

# Wherever I am...



## 2018 "Wherever I am: Recognising God's heart for the world and my part in His plan."

When we use the word "Mission", many Christians think about people called to study a foreign language and culture and to travel to the other side of the world where they will be missionaries. In this framework, mission is seen as the work that Jesus placed in church's hands and that He is waiting for us to complete the task...

***But what if Mission looks different?*** What if the earliest articulation of Mission can be found in Genesis 3: "Adam where are you?" or in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."? What if God has always been on a Mission to restore humankind and the world broken by their sin?

What if, instead of "taking God" to people in foreign lands, we are going to foreign lands (or across the street) to join in what God is already doing in a community? And what if Mission is not about us "delivering" God to a community, but joining a community and *discovering* what God is already doing there?

These are thoughts that were significantly articulated by David Bosch in his book "Transforming Mission." This year, for our Month of Mission in October, we're going to be exploring the idea that our God is on Mission to the World and that we are the junior partners co-operating with what He is already doing.

By this understanding, Mission isn't about *going* but about *being*. And so the theme of our month's devotions is "***Wherever I am: Recognising God's heart for the world and my part in His plan.***"

### Overview of the Month

- **Week 1:** (1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>): **Seeing God's Heart for the World.**
- **Week 2:** (8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>): **Recognising that all people need God's love.**
- **Week 3:** (15<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>): **Seeing what God is already doing.**
- **Week 4:** (22<sup>nd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>): **Dimensions of Mission.** (Recognising Spiritual, Social, Moral and other aspects)
- **Week 5:** (29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>): **How can I be more in-tune?**

# 1 Oct: God's heart for the world

Week 1: Seeing God's Heart for the World.

The main point of Jonah is not the big fish, but Jonah's hard heart and exclusive theology contrasted to God's heart for the world.

The book, recounting a story of an unknown prophet of yesteryear, was written in a time where the Israelites had become exclusive and nationalistic. Foreigners were unclean and unacceptable.

Jonah's hard heart is on display throughout the book:

- When God sends him to Nineveh, Jonah heads in the *opposite* direction: to a place called Tarshish ("Where God is not").
- When the storm comes and the sailors are praying, Jonah is sleeping below decks in depressive denial.
- When he reveals himself as a "prophet of the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land" the sailors believe, but Jonah fatalistically asks to be thrown into the sea.
- His prayer in the belly of the fish appears very pious, but the rest of his actions imply that this was not a prayer from the heart. The fish vomits him up on the land as though it can't stand the hypocrisy anymore!
- I imagine a gastric-juice-bleached Jonah preaching in Nineveh, finally in his element: pronouncing doom and destruction on the city. But the city does something that Jerusalem never did - it repents and God shows mercy.
- Jonah waits in the desert for the promised destruction. Jonah pouts in the desert: more upset about his reputation than about God's mercy for the Ninevites who have repented.
- When God grows a vine overnight in the desert to give him shade and then takes it away, Jonah *loses it*: "I am angry enough to die!"

What comes next is a breath-taking picture of God's heart:

- He's been patient with Jonah, treating the pouting prophet with tenderness and going to great lengths to soften his hard heart.
- He is concerned for the people of Nineveh who don't know their right from their left. We hear the same thing at the cross: "Father forgive them - they don't know what they are doing."
- God cares even about the animals: the rest of creation impacted by human brokenness.

The bottom line of the book is that God cares: He cares for Jonah, for heathen sailors, for the people of Nineveh and for their animals. He has a heart for the world and He will always surprise us with the depths of His mercy and love.

The book ends abruptly. We get a breath-taking picture of God's heart and we are left with Jonah's heart-state undecided. We don't know if Jonah "got it" - I wonder if we do...

Read verse 11 softly and slowly. This is the still small voice that we will hear for this whole month of mission...

But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah4:10-11 )

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Theo Groeneveld is a husband, dad, and sometimes-cyclist. He has served at Emmanuel Presby, Faerie Glen, Pretoria for 21 years.

## 2 Oct: God sees, hears and is concerned

Week 1: Seeing God's Heart for the World.

*It was one of the great moments in Old Testament history. Perhaps the key moment. Moses was a stranger in exile in a strange land -- in Midian -- on the east bank of the Gulf of Aquabah. He married a Midianite woman, settled down, and was tending his father-in-law's sheep on the slopes of Mount Horeb when suddenly the moment happened.*

*A bush burst into flame!*

*It blazed up, the heat of it ripping the air around it. But through the bush burned, it did not burn up because it was a miraculous fire, which is to say, a fire that Moses could not explain, except by explaining it away as no real fire at all but only a figment of Moses' fiery imagination.*

*Then, out of the flaming moment, a voice also flamed up, and of all the conceivable things it might have said, what it said was the name of Moses himself. "Moses, Moses"*

*And so Moses, the stranger and exile, stood there with the muck of sheep on his shoes, and guilty as hell of a man's murder; and he listened and answered:*

*"Here am I" he said, waiting for God only knows what would happen next. (Frederick Beuchner)*

The story of the Exodus, an event that made Israel a nation and shaped its self-identity forever began in dissatisfaction. Some would call this "holy discontent". Moses felt it (Ex 2: 11&12), God felt it (Ex 3: 7 -- 8) and, wouldn't you have felt it too? Around the world today, people are being dehumanized. Poverty, hunger and lack of access to health care and education are the order of the day for most of the world's population. This is not even as much a scandal as lack of clean drinking water (or the commercialization of water). Its comforting to know that whenever you and I experience this discontent with the way the world is, it is likely that God is also hearing "the cry" of his people, that God is "concerned about them" and that ultimately, God "will rescue them".

As followers of Jesus, we experience discontent not only about the world as it is but also about the way the Church seems no longer to be able to witness to God's kingdom in a way many people can understand. Like Moses, we will feel that discontent and want to do something about it and perhaps, we will have the joy to discover that God has heard the cry too and he will work with us to rescue his people.

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey--the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. (Exodus3:7-8)

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### 3 Oct: Knowing the One in our midst

Week 1: Seeing God's Heart for the World.

One of our members moved his business into new premises and asked me to come and pray with him and his staff shortly after they had settled in. As I sat in the Board Room waiting for the staff to gather, I was struck by the significance of what I was being asked to do? The simple act of reading scripture and praying in a place of business vividly reminded all present that God is with us, no matter where we are. Too easily do we relegate God and all things spiritual to a few hours on a Sunday morning and a perhaps a prayer before we head out on weekdays. God is in the world! He is with us everywhere and every moment. In fact, this is exactly what I landed up sharing with the staff of that business. That my being there was not to 'bring God' to them, but simply to recognise his presence with us already and help us be mindful of God and his ways and love for us... Everyday. Ironically, the problem that Paul faced in the first century Roman world, and in Athens in particular, was not a division between the sacred (spiritual/Sundays) and the secular (business/weekdays) as my story illustrates, because the people of that time were very spiritual. Rather, the problem was an ignorance of the purpose and character of God. Paul walks around in Athens and sees gods everywhere, even an idol to an 'UNKNOWN GOD' (just in case they missed one :-)) and uses this spiritual hunger amongst the people to tell them about who God really is and what he is up to in the world. Acts 17:24 is the start of that explanation and Paul's first point is that God wants us to know him. Not, to know ABOUT him, but to know HIM personally. And he tells them that it is possible because God is not far from them, he is in their midst already.

Paul's task was to introduce the Athenians to a personal God who loves, and he cleverly used something from their everyday lives that his hearers could connect with.

What opportunities are there in your life, every day, where you are able to help people, firstly, to recognize the presence of God in their world and, secondly, to connect with this God who wants us to seek him and know him and love him? Keep on the lookout. You may be surprised what you can use to share with others the good news of God's love for the world.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. (Acts17:24-27)

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Chris Judelsohn is minister at Midchurch (Midrand Presbyterian Church), married to Keryn with 3 children -- Rachael, Emma and Nathan. He loves being part of God's work of proclaiming and building God's Kingdom and also finds a strong cup of freshly brewed coffee irresistible. (Chris is also the past convener of Mission and Discipleship)

## 4 Oct: Although we are temporary, we are cared for by God

Week 1: Seeing God's Heart for the World.

*"As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."*  
(Psalm 103:13)

Compassion is emphatically used in this verse. What follows in the subsequent verses until verse 18 is an expression of God's compassion. The feeling of compassion is generally attributed to mothers instead of fathers. The Hebrew word is "riham" from "rehem" -- "the mother, womb", and has to do with showing mercy, pity, forgiveness, forbearance, etc. It is the feeling of a parent for a child, where a parent stands by the child and is ready to take up the suffering of the child.

God is compassionate. God's compassion springs from knowing that human beings are frail, mortal -- as children of dust, and are facing various challenges which are difficult to overcome. God is never aloof from the daily experiences of human beings. He is the God of exodus who sees the misery of the people, hears their cry, becomes concerned and comes down (Exodus 3:7). The sufferings of humanity, especially the weak, powerless, victimised and impoverished are God's suffering. It is this compassion that saw God becoming incarnate and dwelling among us in the human form, as Jesus of Nazareth (John 1).

God's compassion is the source and/or cause for soteriology -- salvation/liberation/redemption. It is this compassion that led to God the Son to be crucified, as he stood for the cause of the downtrodden. This compassion makes God to be concerned about human life as having value. God cares for women who continue to suffer under patriarchy, about the broken bodies of women that are victimised and abused, about the abused children, many of whom are homeless and parentless, and about workers who are being exploited as cheap labourers, while they do not benefit from the produce of their labour.

God's compassion goes with us as we labour in the vineyard, impacting positively on people's lives, as some of our brothers and sisters in the ministry go without stipend for months and years. God's compassion is a call to action. God uses us -- human beings - to care for others. While we are beneficiaries, let us also be conduits for God's compassion until all experience love, peace, righteousness, justice and fairness -- holistic salvation, liberation of their space and environment.

Let us fear (revere) God.

Although we are temporary (weak), we are cared for by our God.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;  
12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.  
**13 As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;**  
14 for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.  
15 As for man, his days are like grass,  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;  
16 the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.  
17 But from everlasting to everlasting  
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children--  
18 with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts. (Psalms 103:11-18)

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## 5 Oct: God's compassion includes our need for justice.

Week 1: Seeing God's Heart for the World.

I must confess that I find the book of Judges slightly heavy going. The characters are complex and often violent. Othniel, a nephew and son-in-law of Caleb, was a Gentile convert who joined the tribe of Judah. Ehud was a left-handed Benjaminite who personally killed king Eglon of Moab. Shamgar, who was also probably not a Jew, possibly the son of a mixed marriage, killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad. Deborah, a prophetess and a judge, challenges the ancient entrenched patriarchy by leading the people in victory over Sisera at the Battle of Kishon near Mt Tabor. Gideon was a coward who became a hero and then led the people into idolatry. Jephthah swore a foolish vow that probably cost him his daughter's life. Samson had a fatal fondness for Philistine women, when he wasn't making poor choices in women, the rest of his life seems to be characterized by chaos, destruction, death and violence: he killed a lion with his hands; he killed 30 Philistines at Ashkelon, and a "thousand" with a jawbone of an ass. He used 300 foxes to burn the grain fields of the Philistines and carried off the city gate of Gaza. Samson was eventually conquered by a Philistine woman, Delilah, and he was blinded and imprisoned at Gaza. He called out to God who allowed his strength to return. He pulled down the Temple of Dagon killing himself and about 3,000 Philistines.

In addition to the odd assortment of characters, the narrative is sometimes difficult to follow. It seems disjointed with very long gaps between some judges and the others who seem to overlap with one another.

So why then would this be regarded as inspired by the Holy Spirit and included in the Canon? There are many possible answers to this, but I wish to suggest two. The first thing is one that the writer of the book suggests in our text for today, and it a vital consideration in our missional journey: that God is deeply moved to compassion by the pain-filled cries of the people of God. Second, this book teaches us is that God chooses to use sinful, fallible, broken and imperfect persons to accomplish God's purposes in the world. Let the people of God never stop crying out to God and let us be aware that God might use the most unlikely as the answers to our prayers.

Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. (Jude2:18)

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Peter Langerman is husband to Sally, father to Jaimee (and father-in-law to Tim), Natasha, Emma and Gabby, loves to walk, cook, read, shout at the TV when the Boks are playing and serves the saints at Durbanville.

## 6 Oct: In spite of our sin, God continues to look on us with compassion

Week 1: Seeing God's Heart for the World.

Hosea is one of those prophets who consistently project very intense conversations between God and Israel. It is clear that the relationship between Israel and God had been almost irretrievably, irredeemably and irrevocably broken down. The conversations, peppered with intermittent regrets and doubts, reveal forgiveness and compassion.

Admah and Zeboiim were two cities that stood in close proximity to the Sodom and Gomorrah of old. They were just as corrupt and sexually immoral as those two infamous cities destroyed by God's sulphuric fire. But some scholars argue that Admah and Zeboiim are so unknown, so unfamiliar, in our conscious everyday Biblical lexicon that when God speaks of Ephraim and Israel in the same terms as Admah and Zeboiim, His most distinct attribute --- *compassion* --- is invoked. In spite of our sin, God continues to look on us with compassion.

It does not matter, the depth and width, the intensity and grave character of our sin, God's heart is changed within Him, and His compassion is aroused. Compassion is undeserving grace, dispensed by God when the damage in the damaged goods is so severe that it can almost not be turned around or repaired. Even with the indelible traces of immoral Admah and self-destructive Zeboiim within God's chosen people; even with the sense of irreversibility in annihilating Israel as God did to all four cities, God continues to look up compassionately upon Ephraim and Israel.

Humanity has been on a warpath to self-destruction and self-annihilation, through racism, through sexism, through tribalism, through endemic corruption within government, through social and cultural idolatry, through heartless financial and capitalist globalism, through worship of sport and money and power ---- God has not given up upon us.

Even though we are worthy of the consuming fire that passed Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, out of existence and out memory, God's graceful heart has been changed within Him and His saving compassion has been aroused for our salvation and our redemption.

In our perpetual, unrelenting state of complete and absolute messed-upness, God continually gives us another chance. Another chance to turn back towards Him, another chance to reassert our destroyed relationship with Him (Creator God), another chance to make right with each other (people), another chance to make right with the created order (nature).

God continuously restores our lost divinity through this compassion and grace. We owe Him one thing: totally giving and surrendering our lives to Him. Our faith that Jesus Christ is the son of the Living God, the forgiving God of Ephraim, the compassionate God of Israel. He is faithful to bring us back to the threshold of grace and blessing, to be graceful to others and to be a blessing to others. In spite of our sin, God continues to look upon us with compassion

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused" (Hosea11:7-8)

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My name is Siphon Mtetwa, ordained to pastoral ministry in the Uniting Presbyterian Church pastoral ministry 33 years ago. I am husband to Xoli with 2 girls (Sinentokozo and Ndumiso) and 1 boy (Khethelo). I'm also grandfather to 3 grandkids. I write IsiZulu vernacular poetry and love listening to jazz. (Siphon is the Moderator-Designate of General Assembly and it's also his birthday today!!)

## 7 Oct: When He deserved "me" time, Jesus welcomes the Crowd

Week 1: Seeing God's Heart for the World.

Jesus had sent the disciples to go out and spread the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the masses. After their return they gave an account to Him of all that they had achieved. It is after that Jesus withdraws with them to a city called Bethsaida. Their journey to spread the Gospel was a demanding task and hence Jesus suggests that they withdraw so that they can all rest. But we notice the multitudes following Jesus Christ and He welcomed them and began to speak them about the Kingdom of God and curing those who had sicknesses. Jesus could have very well rejected them indicating that He needed time for rest and privacy to be with His disciples. This argument could be appealing in our time and age where our society is privatized. Jesus isn't allowed to take a day off by this crowd and He welcomes them wholeheartedly.

We notice that Jesus is moved by compassion and began to attend to the various needs of the masses in this passage. The ministry of Jesus demonstrates to all those who may desire to serve with Him in God's mission the need for a holistic ministry. He has compassion on their souls as well as their body. Jesus recognized the need for the disciples to rest and the need for the truth of Gods kingdom to be ministered to the masses. Jesus was so compassionate that even their shallowness, even their indulgence couldn't stop Him from caring. He cared that people had rest when they were weary, and He also, and more importantly, cared that they had the truth when they were ignorant.

Jesus also had compassion on their need for deliverance. And so at the end of verse 11 it says: "And curing those who had need of healing. "He felt compassion for them and healed their sick." He felt compassion for them, as sheep without a shepherd, so He taught them. He felt compassion for them in their suffering so He healed them. He felt compassion for their physical need He provided food for them. Jesus offers a model of mission work that responds to diverse needs of humanity.

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, 11 but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. (Luke9:10-11)

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## 8 Oct: A variety of people in Jesus' Mission Statement

Recognising that all people need God's love.

Visiting with his disciples in Nazareth, the town where he grew up, Jesus went to teach in their synagogue and he read about the Messiah from the Book of Isaiah, closing his reading with the words "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

He proclaimed that the Spirit of the Lord anointed (or ordained) him to:  
proclaim the good news (the Gospel) to the poor;  
proclaim freedom to prisoners;  
proclaim the recovery of sight to the blind;  
proclaim that the day has come to set the oppressed free,  
proclaiming the year (time or period) of the Lord's favour.

These groups represent all of humanity and proclaim -- *i.e. saying with divine authority* -- that all and everyone need our Lord's love, and all are loved by God and his Messiah, Jesus our Saviour.

It does not matter whether we see that the people we serve with the Gospel of Christ as poor, incarcerated, disabled or oppressed in any possible way we can think of -- we can and should with confidence and authority assure them of God's love for them. It is that practical divine love which is not primarily a feeling, but an action, intervening in and changing circumstances, in order to receive and experience the new era of the Lord's favour that Jesus brought about. This intervention of God, announced by prophets a long time ago, had begun.

On that day -- during his ministry on earth -- Jesus had had started the outreach of God that made it possible for all to be loved, cared for and redeemed by God's salvation.

It is proclaimed. It is official and final and it is announced personally by Messiah Jesus.

**There can be no favouritism in our quest to reach the world** with the Gospel of God's love for them. No single person, or group of people, can be a less significant priority than others. Our mission plan is not determined by our preferences and who **we** are cannot establish the priorities of our outreach.

In a world desperate for comfort, freedom, recognition and salvation we follow our Lord in his anointed calling to accomplish what he, Christ Jesus, made possible.

We are impartial. We are determined. We spread the message of God's love to all.

We, his people, have been ordained to share God's love. We are, like Jesus, called to know nothing but God's unfailing care in healing the world and practically curing everyone according to their individual needs and circumstances, with the awesome love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free, 19  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke4:18-19)

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Andries Combrink is a minister emeritus of the UPCSA, living in Centurion, married to Marthie, father of three and granddad to a lovely teenage girl. He serves the Lord directing a 15 000 views per week worldwide internet portal for protestant church leaders called "Pastoral".

## 9 Oct: Who needs a doctor?

Week 2: Recognising that all people need God's love

I wonder how Matthew's day started when he met Jesus. It must have been like any other day filled with habitual routines to get ready for a normal day. Walking from his home was probably the same old same old; he had done it countless times. Was Matthew aware he had the disease of "being despised" and that he lived as one who was "despised?" I am sure that in the early years during the onset he knew. As time went on, the despising stares and abusive hecklings were just part of the normal routine as he walked through the streets to his tax booth and back home. Had he become so hardened to them that they became part of the noise of the market place?

Diseases of the soul eventually become so enmeshed in our lives that we cannot tell the difference between healthy and sick. We become blind to them, and so do those around us. You are what you are, and you will be as you are. The disease is subtle, it also affects the so called healthy. The label of "despised" is never attached by the one who is despised, it is attached by the "healthy" and so both need healing.

It should never surprise us that we find Jesus dining with the despised: tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes and Pharisees. Someone has to find us and heal us. That healing happened at the Cross and the Resurrection. Its power is so great that it shatters the strongest shackles and changes the worst of us all. I am sure Matthew could say that when he looked back on that day Jesus said; "come follow me."

As we go about our day; we will interact with people we like, some we will simply walk past and others we will even cross over the road so as not to be on the same side. The Church is called to be a redemptive community healed from seeing "despised," to seeing people who need Jesus. He became despised and rejected for the despised and rejected. Our joy is to introduce those with the disease of despised to The Doctor who can heal what no man can do. We have no excuse not to; for once we were alienated, despised and rejected, by both man and God. How do we do it? Where do we do it? Just like Jesus, out in the market place where the despised are gathered.

Make a conscious decision to talk to one person this week that is seen by society as despised, you may find that a conversation about Jesus may just come up.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. (Matthew 9:9-12)

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Royden Blackwell is husband to Sue. They have four boys, Luke, Joel, Caleb and Samuel. Royden serves as minister at St Andrews Benoni and is also Moderator of Highveld Presbytery. When he is not working, he hugs aeroplanes (literally), loves history and attempts to prove to his boys that he is still capable to wrestling them (afterwards he finds a quiet place to have a gentle weep and take anti-inflammatories) (Royden is a member of the MaD Committee).

## 10 Oct: Jesus sees beyond people's past

Week 2: Recognising that all people need God's love

Matthew has a considerable emphasis on church: it is only in this Gospel that the word *ekklesia* occurs. Most of the parables in this Gospel deal with the activity of the Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ and it has a special interest in the future consummation.

This parable clearly shows us the contrast between the professedly religious and the outcasts. Jesus is trying to convey to us that anyone can change his/her mind for the better, that one can move from negative to positive, from present to future and that the first shall be the last and last shall be the first.

The two sons respond to their father's request in two different ways, and there could have been only one that made the father happy... My view is that the two failed to show respect to their father in that the first one disrespected his father by openly refusing his father's request. His refusal was a sign of arrogance and disrespect. While the second one agreed to his father's request but failed to execute it, he also showed disrespect and dishonesty.

It can be said that the first son with his arrogant answer made a turn-around after a serious consideration and deep thinking to finally do what is right. But the one who said "yes" and did not do the job is considered to be a failure.

With this parable, Jesus is declaring God's welcome to the outcasts (and by implication the Gentiles) and condemning the recalcitrant attitude of the Jews.

The repentance of the first son can be seen as the 'first shall be the last and the last shall be the first'. After his arrogance and disrespectful answer, there arises a new person who is liberated to the freedom of Christ. Yes he started so badly with bad and negative attitude, but because of his change of heart and mind, he is considered the better of the two. It is not because of his answer to his father's request that he is hailed as the better one but because of his repentance.

Reformed churches believe in the Reformation of faith under the aspects of Calling and Sanctification. Calling and Faith liberate us from the *history of death* and place us in the *history of life*. The spiritual answer in this parable is that the first son can now live, as a creature of God's grace, according to God's commands and through new obedience can conform to God. The Reformed faith has taught us that the command should be understood as demand of God, and works as a permanent accusation against the sins and neglects of man.

"THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST AND THE LAST SHALL BE THE FIRST"

MT 21:28 "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

29 " 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

30 "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

31 "Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

(Matthew 21:28-32)

My name is Diutloileng David Monokoane, I was born in Halenono, Maseru Lesotho. I grew up at Boipatong, Vanderbijlpark in Gauteng. I matriculated at Lekoa-Shandu High School in Sharpville. I'm married to Mamokete Lydia Monokoane and we are blessed with four girls and four grandchildren. I was ordained in 1988 and have served in four congregations before the current ones of All Saints (Klerksdorp) and Solomon Rathebe (Mafikeng) in shared ministry. ( Diutloileng is a member of the MaD committee)

# 11 Oct: Serving Jesus Unexpectedly

Week 2: Recognising that all people need God's love

One of the most well known scholars provides insight into the Augustine's understanding of Christ's self identification with the "least of mine" in Matthew 25. This understanding has universal as distinct from specific Christian designation. He further demonstrates how Matthew 25 can be used as a hermeneutical key for interpreting Augustine more broadly. He also focuses on the divine self-emptying of Christ in the Incarnation and its link to Augustine's emphasis on the unity between Christ and the poor.

## **Serving the Lord Unexpectedly**

The first thing that Jesus wants to say about His ministry is that he was serving God. It seems to be a simple idea serving unexpectedly, unknowingly and unaware but think about it a minute. What comes to your mind? Doing what you are told? Lowliness? Submissiveness? Compliance? Deference? Let us look at the three characteristics of serving unexpectedly.

### *(1) Lowliness:*

Serving the Lord means lowliness, serving the Lord with all humility. Lowliness means feeling indebted to all people.

Lowliness says, I am a debtor to the poor , to the unwanted ,to the uncared, to the wise and foolish, to friends and enemies. Lowliness does not think in terms of its rights. It empties itself and takes the form of a true servant.

### *(2) Tears*

Serving the Lord means tears.

Tears can come from physical pain or frustrations or from discouragement or from seeing the struggle of others.

Serving the Lord means getting involved in people's struggles for faith and hope and truth and changing their lives and their perspectives.

### *(3) Trials*

If you are being tried, then hear the word of James, "Count it all joy brothers; when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect; that you may be perfect, and complete; lacking in nothing.

Fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, Christian truth is not just knowledge to be analysed and understood; it is a vision of reality to be savored and enjoyed and be felt by everybody.

In conclusion: Serving unexpectedly according to Matthew means living for what profits the Church.

Share your life. Amen.

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.' (Matthew25:35-40)

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Lita Madaka is currently a minister of the UPCSA. He has been the Minister of Duff Congregation, in Idutywa, for 14 years. He's been married to Lungie for 16 years and is blessed with two Kids Khanyisile daughter and son Linokhanyo. You will notice that all our names rotate around the Light. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Lita is a member of the MaD committee)

## 12 Oct: Joining Jesus in His Mission

Week 2 Recognising that all people need God's Love

Loving our neighbours is the mission of every Christ-follower in every local Church! How do I love my neighbour? By doing the work of God by offering Aid, Advancement or Advocacy to our neighbours who need our help. This is the work of every disciple. What does it look like for us as God's people to be joining Jesus in His mission to *weave shalom*?

An excellent example comes in the Parable of the Good Samaritan which begins with an expert in the Bible asking Jesus how to get life. Jesus asks him, "How do you read this in the Bible?" He answers, to love God completely and to love your neighbour as yourself. The expert wants to know "Who is my neighbour?" *How do we weave shalom?*

The Samaritan saw the injured man, went to him and took care of him. *Weaving shalom* means seeing the strands that are right in front of you. It means having the eyes of a weaver. It means seeing and acting. If a person is in need, go help. Put aside your own personal issues and help. If there are obvious needs right there in front of you, jump in! At work, as you see a co-worker struggling, start *weaving*. At the gas station, pay inside and offer words of encouragement to the crabby person there. At the restaurant, say something that tells your server you care about them as a person. Give aid. But don't stop with just the quick and easy. *Weaving* takes time, and patience.

After telling the story, with all its shocks and surprises, Jesus returns to the man's question. But Jesus doesn't answer it. Instead, Jesus turns it around by asking "who acted like a neighbour." Rather than identifying who your neighbour is, Jesus is more concerned with us acting like a neighbour - '*The one who showed mercy.*'

Jesus lifts up the hated and despised Samaritan as the hero of the parable. He exalts one who is least likely to be considered a neighbour by the Jews.

Jesus advocated for people on the margins, changing how we see all people on the margins. It is *weaving* them into the tapestry of God's people, of God's kingdom on earth, of who gets to be included in the beautiful work of Aid, Advancement, and Advocacy that God is doing. This is what it means to join Jesus in His mission in the world.

Mother Theresa said: "*We have been created in His image for greater things, to love and to be loved.*" She's right! We have been created in God's image for greater things. Jesus ended with this charge to the local church, "Go and do likewise."

Vital churches, living and life-giving churches, "go and do likewise." *Weaving shalom*

(Adapted from a sermon by David Werner preached at Forest Hills Church in Aug 2015)

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. *Look after him,' he said, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30-37)

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Madoda Mfene is a husband to Noxolo Mfene, father to Chulumanco, Liyema and Lihle and currently serving at Tiyo Soga Memorial Congregation. (Madoda serves on the MaD committee)

## 13 Oct: Are we keeping them from Jesus?

Week 2 Recognising that all people need God's Love

People, presumably parents, were bringing their children to Jesus Christ but then Christ's disciples began to stop and rebuke the parents for doing so. Christ however forbids the disciples from such actions. His statement reveals God's heart for all people. It also gives authority and strength to the people who were bringing children to Him.

There are reasons for the disciples to have reacted to the bringing of children to Jesus. One was based on their traditional views, opinions and conduct towards children: It was very difficult for the Jews to separate religion and tradition as most of the disciples would have been raised in Judaism which forbade children to be involved in their practices until a certain age. In addition, they felt that children have less needs, problems and difficulties than adults. According to the disciples adults had more pressing needs than children hence they needed more time with Christ. Sometimes, we apply these reasons to people who would have come to Christ. Thus, we keep them away from Christ.

Christ's response reveals God's love and heart for the World as He says "Let them come to me." It's something that has to be continually in us and always recognised if we are to bring people to God - not keeping them away. This implies that our part in this great plan has to be much clearer not twisted by culture, tradition, custom and perceptions on other people. Understanding God's plan, having knowledge of what really it is can remove those self-imposed impediments to our fellow humans in their quest to be saved.

Christ accepts everyone. He is ever-ready to take everyone into His Kingdom, without discrimination based on age, maturity, understanding or reasoning. When one seriously and deeply considers this, how much understanding of religious issues does an infant have? What is the reasoning capacity of such an infant? And how deep are the values of wisdom of the infant? Then one would come to a knowledge and understanding that Christ puts no conditions to those who desire to be in His presence. This clearly shows Christ in a shining light of love for all humanity (Galatians 3:8).

For the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Christ clearly points out that we have to have a child like character if we are to ever entertain any hopes for entering God's Kingdom. Children have that unquestioning faith and trust. They have that amazing way of quickly forgiving and burying all the hurts and smile as nothing has happened. They have that natural ability of dependency and obedience, which adults find difficult to come to terms with. Christ is saying we are to adopt these characteristics for us to see God's Kingdom.

People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (Luke 18:15-16)

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Elias Simango is a minister at Dzivarasekwa/ Norton UPCSA. Married to Medury, father of three. I believe that we all have different callings in life and mine is to be a Pastor. I love what I do and I enjoy every day of it. (Elias serves on the MaD committee)

## 14 Oct: Jesus sees the 'little' people.

Week 2 Recognising that all people need God's Love

Imagine being the most hated and despised member of your community... Zacchaeus, of Jericho was wealthy, a chief tax-collector, mentioned only in the Gospel of Luke. Tax collectors were despised as traitors (working for the Roman Empire, not for their Jewish community), and as being corrupt. Zacchaeus was not only dealing with the community's hate, but he was also challenged by the fact that he was a "wee little man".

Ironically, Jericho was one of the cities favoured by the priests. Nonetheless, our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, challenged public opinion in that city, by announcing his intention to lodge for the night with one whose life's occupation was so hateful to the Jewish religious world. Matthew Henry comments, "Christ is come to his house, and where Christ comes he brings salvation with him. He came into this lost world to seek and to save it. His design was to save, when there was no salvation in any other."

The story of Zacchaeus teaches us that we need to recognise that all people need God's love. We cannot discriminate against them because of their gender, race, handicap, social status, or as in the case of Zacchaeus, their physical stature. Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour was crucified, died and rose again for all humanity; His love for us will go to any height, depth, length or width to bring us salvation.

William Barclay argues: "The story ends with the great words, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. We must always be careful how we take the meaning of this word "lost." In the New Testament it does not mean damned or doomed. It simply means in the wrong place. A thing is lost when it has got out of its own place into the wrong place; and when we find such a thing, we return it to the place it ought to occupy. A man is lost when he has wandered away from God; and he is found when once again he takes his rightful place as an obedient child in the household and the family of his Father."

Finally, Jesus Christ wants all people to find their rightful place before God our Father. He needs you and I to be part of His mission, therefore we need to recognise that all people need God's love, including the fact that Jesus sees "little" people.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ give us your heart of love, as we love all people, including the "little people".*

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. (Luke 19:1-6)

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Wayne van Heerden is husband to Frances, Dad to David and Angela and enjoys gym, serving at Centurion West Presbyterian Church. (Wayne is a member of the MaD Committee)

## 15 Oct: Coincidence or God-incidence

Week 3: Seeing what God is already doing.

The dictionary defines the word coincidence this way: a remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection. Christians sometimes see their daily encounters not as a coincidence but rather as a God-incidence.

A God-incidence might be defined as: A happy coincidence or outcome that was most likely directed or orchestrated by God. The classic example is for a friend or relative to keep popping into your mind, so you give them a call and it turns out that they really needed to talk with you. Another example would be when money is needed to cover some expense, and money shows up unexpectedly for the exact amount required. Such God-incidences are miracles so small that it's tempting to think that no miracle really happened at all.

Look at Philip in Acts 2, he "happened" to be travelling along the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Verse 26 says, "But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go south to the road that runs from Jerusalem down to Gaza." (This is a desert road)." Now if we phoned a friend and said, 'an angel of the Lord has spoken to me and told me to phone you', they may think you were a little "crazy"! So, is this a "God-incidence" -- a miracle encounter between a questioning great man of authority and Philip in order for the Word of God to be spread to the four corners of the earth? After Philip had explained to the Ethiopian what he was reading, he asked to be baptised and "Look! Water!", on the desert road! As Albert Einstein once said, "coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous".

Sometimes God opens a door of opportunity to his people in very unlikely places. God is in control of the entire universe, right? So, these encounters may be a small way he's letting us know that he's with us and thinking about us and enabling us to carry his Word and work to unexplained places and people?

Are all of the circumstances in our life by random chance or does God perhaps sometimes eliminate the uncertainty so as to impact the outcome? The answer is up to each of us to decide.

"So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch [a man of great authority], a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning, and sitting in his chariot he was reading [the scroll of] the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the [Holy] Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I [understand] unless someone guides me [correctly]?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now this was the passage of Scripture which he was reading: "Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open His mouth. 33 "In humiliation His judgment was taken away [justice was denied Him]. Who will describe His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." 34 The eunuch replied to Philip, "Please tell me, about whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip spoke and beginning with this Scripture he preached Jesus to him [explaining that He is the promised Messiah and the source of salvation]. 36 As they continued along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch exclaimed, "Look! Water! What forbids me from being baptized?" 37 [Philip said to him, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I do believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] 38 And he ordered that the chariot be stopped; and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him." (Amplified Translation) (Acts2:27-38)

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Ruth Armstrong is the serving minister of St Andrews Germiston. She is wife to Warren and mother to Lia, Sarah and Noah. She crochets to stay sane and when that doesn't work, she runs (on the road)!



## 16 Oct: He's way ahead of us...

Week 3: Seeing what God is already doing.

At first glance, this story may sound a little like the Red Sea parting. That Moses raising his staff and the priests stepping into the water here are kind of the same thing. There is one key difference however -- this river (in flood) did not part, it simply stopped flowing. (I love the description that it piled up in a heap. What does a heap of water look like I wonder?)

And this is significant because it didn't heap up there -- it heaped up at a town called Adam - 20km away. In order for dry ground to have appeared as the Priests touched the banks -- means that the heaping up would have happened at least two hours before.

Before the Israelites have even acted in faith and stepped in the Jordan, God had gone ahead of them and stopped the water flowing. Isn't that beautiful? God goes ahead of them, knowing Joshua's heart, knowing the faith of the people, knowing that they had prepared themselves for this day to see what God would do. And he does.

And this is not the only time in Scripture that God goes ahead of his people. We find Aaron already on his way to meet Moses when God meets him at the burning bush -- God knew his fears would make him struggle and already provided a solution. He knew in advance that Abraham would be prepared to sacrifice Isaac, and had a ram waiting in the thicket.

And when it comes to sharing the Gospel, God does that too. Time and time again when Paul goes on his missionary journeys he finds people who are 'god-fearers'. They don't know Jesus, they don't know the gospel -- but God is already working in their hearts preparing the soil, making them receptive and willing to receive the glorious news of Christ's salvation.

We know God is a God on mission. We know God reached out to us first. We know that Jesus was the first cross-cultural missionary (in a manner of speaking!)

And so as we go out into the world spreading God's love and light and truth and peace -- we're not going anywhere where God hasn't already been. We are simply joining his work. Just as with the Jordan river crossing, God has gone before us.

Today may this truth encourage your hearts. God knows each place that your feet will go this day, as with every day, and he has gone ahead of you and started the work -- Will you join him?

So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. 15 Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, 16 the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground. (Joshua3:14-17)

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Jackie is a minister at Emmanuel and Grace Presbyterian, married to Tim and raising her greatest blessings - an ebony and ivory pair of children -- Christine 4 and Jesse 2.

## 17 Oct: God will prompt people to ask us before we tell them... Be prepared!

Week 3: Seeing what God is already doing.

Sometime this year, I met up with an old high school classmate and he is a devout Muslim. We discovered a lot of things trying to catch up and it was within the conversation that he asked this very important question, "Tell me as Christian, is the Jesus you preach about all about miracles and money?" Honestly I was not and ready for that very important question. As I pondered on how to respond to him I realized that God sometimes prompts people to ask us before we tell them and then the big question is are we ready to answer those questions based on what we hope in.

In the Epistle Peter has been trying to bring hope and caution to his audience and it seems the audience was on the receiving end of slander and malicious talk according to 1 Peter 2:11-12. They are being persecuted because of their hope and trust in Jesus Christ. Questions are being asked about the one they worship and believe in. Peter encourages them that they must not fear or be troubled when they suffer because of their hope in Christ.

As we find ourselves in an increasingly pluralistic society, people ask and will ask questions that will challenge the core of our Christian belief. In a world of many lords and gods, who is Jesus to the world and to us Christians today? Peter encourages us that our hope is based on God's promises, and is also based on the believer's experience of God's faithfulness. Peter further explains the nature of hope we are in, "It is *"a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that doesn't fade away, reserved in Heaven for you"* (1:3-4). This is what we must be prepared to defend at any given time or situation. When question like the one my Muslim friend asked is asked, the reason for my hope on Christ as stated by Peter is the answer. However Peter says we must do it in gentleness and respect.

Let us be ready always to defend our reason for hope in Christ because God prompts people to ask before we tell them as Achtemer rightly says "In this context, not even fear of further persecution is to deter the Christians from giving a full account of their 'hope'. It is to live its life openly in the midst of the unbelieving world, and just as openly to be prepared to explain the reasons for it."

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect... (1Peter3:15)

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Tatenda Garande is Husband to Juliet, Dad to Kyle Tatenda, serving at Budiro Presbyterian Church in Harare

## 18 Oct: God prepares the way for the Israelites

Week 3: Seeing what God is already doing.

In the 21st century the world is faced with many questions: "Does God exist?" "Who is God?" "Is God sovereign?" These questions come about considering the changing world in which we live. There are many challenges which face the world such as war, corruption, injustice and natural disasters. In addition we have media reports of corrupt 'pastors' who mislead and abuse their flocks. These experiences tempt us to doubt God's existence and his sovereignty.

The Israelites, just like us today, were faced with various strange beliefs and practices but had an opportunity to trust and worship one and true God the creator. In Numbers 14:14 we are told that the Israelites had an opportunity not only to see their LORD face to face but also to be led by him in their journey through a pillar of cloud by day as well as a pillar of fire by night.

As this year's mission theme and our reading remind us: God is still present in the 21st century. He is not only present but also sovereign and in control: *"The earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters."* (Ps.24:1-2)

The LORD's existence and sovereignty is visible even those who are not yet a part of the church. Moses affirms that other people and nations have *'already heard'* how God has been with the Israelites. Our God is at work in every part of the world, even among those nations that aren't at peace, even those that strongly condemn Christian faith and persecute the few that practice it. Therefore, the gospel should be preached beyond the boundaries of our regions. Jesus prayed for everyone in the world when he stated that: "My prayer is not for them (believers) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (John 17:20).

It is possible to get distracted by the challenges we face in this world and even begin to think that God is absent and lose our faith and focus. It is important to seek God's grace that he should always open our eyes to see and believe in him despite living in the changing world. In a changing world, God remains the same.

Finally, we are all challenged to recognize the presence of God the Trinity in terms of his plan and purpose for our lives wherever we are and to witness about him to others. We should also not forget that even those who don't yet believe have heard about this same God in some way and they need our witness to them as well as prayers for God's illumination upon their lives.

"And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have *already heard* that you, LORD, are with these people and that you, LORD have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night." (Numbers14:14)

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My name is James Lungu and I am a husband to Emelly and a Dad to two boys Joel and Walinase-Emanuel. I am serving as a minister at George Presbyterian Church which is a congregation under Muchinga Presbytery in Zambia.

## 19 Oct: God works in all things...

Week 3: Seeing what God is already doing.

Deep in the psyche of western minds is a subconscious picture of a God who is apart - even remote - from us. He is 'up there' or 'out there' somewhere, watching what goes on and occasionally intervening on our behalf. At its heart this view sees God more as a Spectator than one who is involved in what is going on in the world and in our lives.

That is a broken view of God.

Listen to our text: "God works in all things. ." Far from being the Distant Spectator, God is the Ultimate Participant. In all things around us, be they good or painful, God is slowly and relentlessly and in the face of constant push back, working to bring His purposes to bear in this beautiful yet fractured world. And He does so not from Combined Operations HQ - wherever that may be - but by immersing Himself in this Universe.

God is in the flow of all things. He is the living and energising God within all reality. He is awesome. He is beyond the measure of our minds, but He is closer to us than breathing, working in all things, enlivening and sustaining the Universe, bringing hope and healing to broken lives.

We need to rediscover God, or re-imagine Him, as the God of the present continuous tense, the God working in all things who, even as you are reading these words, is loving, strengthening, healing, reconciling, restoring, sustaining, blessing, resisting.

God is at work "in all things" and He does so in deep oneness and partnership with His beloved Son who once told us that, "My Father goes on working, and so do I."

If there is one thing God asks of us it is that we participate with Him in what He is doing in the world. Isn't that what mission is about?

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

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James Gray is the minister of the Hermanus United Church. He likes to walk on the beach, hike in the mountains, play golf and tell Bible stories.

## 20 Oct: He goes ahead of us

Week 3: Seeing what God is already doing.

Jesus is preparing for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He sent his disciples to go and fetch a donkey from a village ahead. He wanted a donkey that has never been used before: a pure donkey for sacred use. He has been in Jerusalem before, but this time around Jesus comes to Jerusalem as a King. This fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah: "... see your king comes to you, righteous, victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus rode on a donkey signifying that he was a man of peace. A horse would have portrayed Him as a man of war. Horses were mostly used for war in Roman times. Jesus' mission was not war but peace.

The passage shows that Jesus goes ahead of us in his mission. The mission is not ours but God's. Ours is not a complete new mission but we are continuing from where Jesus left off. God has called us to go for him, therefore let us cooperate with God in what He is already doing in his mission. We serve under the Lordship and authority of Christ. Paul reminds us that we are God's fellow workers (2Cor6:1).

Is there any situation that will hinder us from participating in God's mission? Sometimes life can be tough. The cost of living can go up beyond our reach. Inflation can erode all our monthly earnings but we are expected to fulfill our mandate in God's mission. Christ experienced the same suffering. It was not only physical but mental suffering also. He was a man of sorrows and familiar with pain yet at the end He says, "It is finished".

Friends, when we are troubled by gender issues, let us remember that Christ was ahead of us in addressing gender when He came to commune and fellowship with both men and women. When we are persecuted by the political system of the day, Christ went through the same and God is in our midst calling for justice. Wherever I am, let me recognize God's heart for the world and take part in calling for a just society. When are faced with hunger, civil strife and diseases, God is already on the ground showing his unfailing love for the people. How about us joining God in what he is already doing?

We are in the dispensation of the Spirit who empowers and comforts us as we carry out God's mission in the world.

Beloved, let us recognize God's heart for the world and co-operate with Him in his mission. He has called us to His mission. It is not about us, but about God's purpose. Therefore, let us lead purpose-driven lives as we proclaim God's Word and serve him with all humility.

Go to the village ahead of you enter it; you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anymore asks you, "Why are you untying it?" Say, "The Lord needs it" 32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' 34 they replied, 'the Lord needs it". (Luke19:30-34)

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Biggie Mususa, husband to Tsitsi, serving at Mkoba Presbyterian Church, in City of Gweru. Zimbabwe.

## 21 Oct: Provision for the Visitors

Week 3: Seeing what God is already doing.

It was the time of Pentecost when the Apostles were entirely under the Holy Spirit's influence and power. They were filled by the Holy Spirit: whatever they did was under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit influenced Apostles to the level where they started doing the unusual; they started speaking in other languages than their native tongue. The languages that the Apostles were able to speak were as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. They were able to speak because the Holy Spirit was already working as an enabler. As the Apostles were speaking strange languages, the crowd that was present at that time had different people who the Bible describes as Jews, devout men. The term devout ("God fearing") was applied to men who were cautious about offending God; they were keeping commandments. The Jews at that time were scattered into almost all nations, but still they would obviously desire to be present as often as possible at the great feasts of the nation in Jerusalem. Many who came up to the Feast of the Passover would remain to the Feast of the Pentecost. This made the city of Jerusalem to have a lot of strangers during festivals.

From this portion of scripture, we learn that we need to be under the power of the Holy Spirit in order that we can do what God wants us to do in His mission. If we are on our own it is difficult to connect with God in what He is already doing. It is also important to know that in mission God sets the agenda and people need only to follow what is on the agenda. The Holy Spirit made the Apostles to begin speaking in different tongues because He knew that the audience had people who would understand such tongues.

Whatever audience that can be presented to us in the process of sharing the word of God, we must have it in mind that the Holy Spirit is already working and convicting the people. The convicted people will be able to respond because God is already working ahead of us. There are times where as the church we think mission can only be done by some people (e.g. ministers, Evangelists, elders), but it should be understood that whatever different gifts and talents God has given in the church are there for a purpose. As devout men were coming from all nations and they were able to identify the languages that were spoken by the Apostles, so the people from all walks of life who God has already touched are able to identify and respond to the word of God.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts2:4-11)

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Kennedy M'hone is a minister at Misisi Presbyterian Church in Lusaka, Zambia and is a husband to Sharon C. M'hone.

## 22 Oct: A Prayer for the King -- became a Messianic expectation

Week 4: Dimensions of Mission

What one gets from reading the first verses in this passage are two things which frame our meditation, the God of justice and righteousness and the preferential option of the poor.

**First**, God is presented as the embodiment of justice and righteousness. The God of justice and righteousness. A king therefore must be endowed with both justice and righteousness, hence the prayer by David for Solomon who was to be his successor.

**Second**, as one reads the entire passage, one sees the close affinities between justice, righteousness and the preferential option for the poor. The afflicted among the people, the weak and the children of the needy seem to have a great significance in how we ought to understand God. It must be stated that they are not afflicted, weak and needy because God desires for them to be like that. On the contrary God provides all things for humanity in abundance but there are people and systems that rob people of these. Also important to note is that for the afflicted and the needy to exist there must be an oppressor. Oppression and violence are key for the oppressor. In order for the poor to be saved, helped or rescued, the oppressor must be crushed. But often we see the collapse of justice and righteousness and the focus on the spiritual aspects. The collapse is intended to dissuade the exploited from resisting exploitation and the focus on the spiritual aspect is meant to direct them to find solace in the fact that even in their poverty or affliction, amongst other things, God loves them and that should be enough. Systems and structures that impoverish people and make them to set their minds on things above, i.e. heaven, spirit and not material, are equally evil and must be debunked!

The king that embodies justice, righteousness and has the poor at the heart of his reign will deliver the needy, the weak and the afflicted, save them from death and rescue them from oppression and violence. This message comes out strongly in Jesus' manifesto and thus speaks to our mission as church. We are called to disrupt the systems that impoverish God's people. If we are to understand God, our starting point will certainly be the poor, the afflicted, weak and the needy, "for precious is their blood in his sight".

For he will deliver the needy who cry out,  
the afflicted who have no one to help.  
13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy  
and save the needy from death.  
14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence,  
for precious is their blood in his sight. (Psalms72:12-14)

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Fundiswa Kobo, Lecturer at UNISA. Serves as the Chaplain for Sedibeng House, and a member of the following committees of the General Assembly: Doctrine and Ecumenical Relations

## 23 Oct: Spiritual and Practical.

Week 4: Dimensions of Mission

James poses two rhetorical questions about faith without deeds which are;

1. "What good is it?"
2. "Can it save?"

The first question implies a general lack of any usefulness for a faith without actions. The second question specifies a particular use that is lacking: salvation itself. The combined impact is to declare a thorough uselessness of faith without deeds and, also to declare its particular uselessness in regard to salvation.

James consistently speaks of deeds as actions that are taken because of one's faith and those therefore demonstrate and authenticate one's faith. The primary, earnest and repeated point he makes is "not that works must be added to faith but that genuine faith includes works".

James raises the following points about deeds:

1. His illustration calls for the *active giving of material help* for people lacking clothing and food.
2. Deeds are not simply keeping of religious ritual but *acts of love* commanded in Christ's "royal law"
3. A conviction that Christians are *responsible to care* for each other. He pictures needy fellow believers in his example. As Christians too often we speak the good wishes without taking practical actions.

For James, faith begins with a word - the Word of God that gives us the new life. And if that Word from God gives people life, then those who live out that Word extend life to others. Faith is what is active in a person's life, actively giving life to you and to those around you. If it is not active it is not faith. The worst thing James puts across here is the scenario of ignoring the needy, the poorest of the poor.

This is what exactly Jesus was saying in Matthew 19:24 that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Paul echoes the same words and says that no man can inherit the kingdom of God without such work. (Gal 5:2) James says "Do not fool yourself by just listening to his Word" instead put it into practice. People around the world meditate on God's word, some have memorized verses. They spend most, if not all their time praying and undertaking the church's work. But they are kidding and fooling themselves if works are not integrated with that.

James' message to the believer is that we are saved for the purpose of doing good works, but if we fail to pursue good works, our faith is useless to God and to us. He clearly spoke the good news as the generous gifts of God. James wants the good news to be experienced by each believer and through each believer to the many others who need tangible expression of grace.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if a someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James2:14-17)

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Gleness M. Magovere, Minister at Chitungwiza UPCSA, married to Remigio, mother of Rufaro A., Anesu and Artwell Kupakwashe.



## 24 Oct: Wed 24, Isaiah 58:6-7, True Fasting

Week 4: Dimensions of Mission

Do you regularly fast as a Christian? When was the last time you fasted? Why did you fast? Is fasting the forgotten discipline in the Church today? Is fasting the forgotten discipline in the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa? Fasting is one of the forgotten disciplines for children of God in our day and age. Because many Catholics fast especially during lent and Charismatics fast regularly, many Presbyterians have gone to the other extreme, they don't fast at all. When it comes to fasting, there is the right way and the wrong manner of fasting. This devotion is there to help us fast in the right way.

### **1. True fasting involves setting free those who are bound by the chains of injustice**

When you look around what is happening in our nations today, wherever you look, you will see people who are treated unjustly. It is the job of every Christian to help out people who are treated unjustly. We are called upon to make life much easier for those who are for instance living in abject poverty, people who cannot access justice from our Courts and many such places (Isaiah 9:4; Joel 2:12-14; Nehemiah 5:10-11; Jeremiah 34:9).

### **2. True fasting gets you an opportunity to share what you have with others.**

There are several ways one can fast. For instance, one can fast from certain foods and the money saved from there can be used to help someone who is vulnerable or struggling in one area or the other. One can simply cut down on some of the luxuries and the resources saved from there can be used to assist those in need (Ezekiel 16:4; Luke 3:11; Micah 6:8).

### **3. True fasting helps you to practically love God and other people**

We are required to show our love both vertically and horizontally (1John 4:19-21). Our love for God and other people must be sincere. (Genesis 29:14; Isaiah 16:4; Hebrews Ezekiel 18:16; Job 31:18-20; Matthew 25:36; Luke 10:31-32; James 1:27; Proverbs 19:17).

### **CONCLUSION**

How has your fasting been? Do you fast in the manner it is expected of you? If you have not been fasting, I encourage you to fast. Fasting has many spiritual benefits.

Amen

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter--- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (Isaiah58:6-7)

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The Reverend Allan Mchulu husband to Jessie and father of two daughters: Deborah and Natasha from Kabwata Uniting Presbyterian Church in Lusaka Zambia. Munali Presbytery.

## 25 Oct: God cares about the Land.

Week 4: Dimensions of Mission

God's mission is cosmic, starting with creation (Gen 1 & 2) and concluding with everything made new (Rev 21:5). Paul implies that salvation and our adoption are intertwined with that of creation (Ro 8:22-23).

While God's mission is cosmic in reach and impact, it's local and contextual in implementation, starting by transforming individual lives. It's a ministry of presence with deep listening to people's needs, pains, joys and frustrations in daily life. Land is a crucial aspect of life, providing a means of accommodation, food and work, as well as belonging and identity. Land is integral to creation; so it features in both the cosmic and local dimensions of God's mission. God says, "The land is mine." (Lev 25:23).

Land is an emotive issue in our current economic and political climate. Many Christians have mixed feelings, acknowledging past injustices while suffering anxiety about land redistribution. We must ensure productivity for ongoing sustainability and food security, as well as ecological justice for future generations. So how does the land feature in our faith and spirituality?

Stewardship, covenant, justice, salvation, and the sacraments all relate to the land. Deut 11:12 says God cares for the land. Lev 25:1-7 talks about a sabbatical for the land to rest from cultivation. Lev 25:8-55 specifies a Jubilee for land redistribution. Isa 5:8 warns against accumulation of land; Jer 2:7 condemns defiling the land; Mic 2:1-2 condemns coveting and seizing the land, defrauding people of their homes and inheritance. Mark 16:15 records Jesus telling his disciples to "preach the gospel to all creation" and 2 Cor 5:17 says, in Christ "the new creation has come."

The central tenets of our Christian faith mentioned above are inextricably linked to the land. God's first calling to humankind was to care for creation, including the land. When he established his covenant with Abraham, he promised land and descendants. Both the sabbatical and Jubilee years relate to land. The sacramental elements of water, bread and wine are products of the land. And salvation is extended to all creation, groaning as in the pangs of childbirth as we wait to be acclaimed as God's adopted sons/daughters.

Can there be any doubt that we're called to care about the land as God does, to exercise responsible stewardship, and to respect the land as an integral part of our divine inheritance? Land is crucial to God's cosmic mission in our local context. How does land feature in your lifestyle and Christian calling?

But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. (Deuteronomy 11:11-12)

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Glynis Goyns is a minister serving at St Francis, Waterkloof. She represented the UPCSA on the Board of SAFCEI, a faith-based environment NGO from 2005 to 2018 and is deeply committed to ecological justice.

## 26 Oct: Ritual faith needs to become in-ward and other-ward

Week 4: Dimensions of Mission

I once read a story about a rich young prince who gave a basket full of rotten food to a poor beggar. The poor man received the basket with a smile and left the palace, emptied the basket of its content and cleaned it. He put beautiful flowers in it, returned it to the palace and gave it to the prince.

The young prince was surprised and asks the beggar "I gave you a basket full of rotten things and you bring it back filled with beautiful flowers. Why?"

The poor man replied with a smile "Every human being gives what is in his heart"

As we take part in God's mission in 2018, it is critical to pause and introspect our in-ward faith. Jesus used an imagery of a cup or a dish to demonstrate the importance of man and rituals in His mission. We are cups or dishes (more like vessels) that God created to use for His mission. He uses vessels to demonstrate His love to the world. Cleaning (as ritual) the vessels is good but it must be done both inside and outside, to serve its purpose well. Cleaning outside only would *not* make the vessel eligible for its work. The problem that the Pharisees had was to concentrate on some rituals or laws which according to Jesus were less important. The law of tithe is an out-ward ritual which is important but it must be completed with the in-ward ritual faith of love, justice, merciful and compassionate to the poor and the needy.

If we concentrate on the out-ward rituals, it will be like cleaning the cup or the dish outside only. How useless is it, to wash the outside of a cup while leaving the inside dirty! If the inside is dirty, whatever is in the cup will be dirty too and unfit to drink. God who has created the cup, he needs it clean both in and outside to use it well.

It is not only stretching out your hand (in giving) which is important. Jesus is saying your heart is involved and it determines what you are giving. The rich young prince offered what was in his heart despite the riches he had.

Friends, let us have God's love in our hearts as we take part in His mission. Amen!

Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. 42 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. (Luke11:39-42)

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Faresy Sakala, wife to Misheck, mother to Robson, Rose and Ronald and a minister at Trinity -- Gweru Presbyterian Church. Overwhelmed with duties, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"

## 27 Oct: Wake up call

Week 4: Dimensions of Mission

Malachi is inspired to prophesy about the coming of two messengers. John the Baptist is the one sent to prepare the way and Jesus Christ is the Covenant Messenger. In an ancient royal procession the messenger went before the King to announce his arrival, to indicate the route, and to remove any obstacles in the road. John the Baptist fulfilled this exact ministry for Jesus (Matt11:10). The same idea is indicated in Isa40:3-5. God's purpose for bringing this specific prophecy through Malachi in his day was probably because Israel complained that the Messianic promises of Haggai and Zechariah were not fulfilled. Here Malachi shows that the way for the Messiah must be prepared, and they aren't ready yet.

At the end of Malachi 2, Israel complained that God seemed to reward the wicked and did not exercise His justice in the world. God responds to their complaint by saying, "I will set things right with My Messiah, and before Him will come My messenger."

And so The Lord promises that He Himself will come - not merely a new or better prophet, but the Lord Himself - the second Messenger- Jesus Christ coming to institute a new covenant as the fulfillment of the old covenant and as a judge with the purpose of purifying judgement. This will be a fearful coming. He will be a swift witness (who saw every sin) against sorcerers, which was a sin the Jews became familiar with sorcery and other magical arts during their captivity in Babylon. Jews of Christ's time practiced sorcery (Acts8:9; 13:6; Gal5:20). He is coming to judge against the practices of injustices which defraud labourers of their wages and oppression against orphans and widows which also deprive the foreigners justice by not fearing the Lord God Almighty. This injustice is a characteristic of the last Anti-Christian confederacy, about to be consumed by the brightness of Christ's second coming (Rev13:13, 2Thes2:9).

Dear friends, this is a warning and a wake up call even in today's time about the second coming of Christ. He will come to judge the world full of hate against our fellow brothers and sisters, a world full of political, social and economic injustices against the less privileged in the society as well as within our churches. The judgement shall be fair for everyone shall be judged according to his/her deeds.

God's ultimate purpose is to cleanse the society and to change the hearts of people. When Jesus returns in glory and rules on this earth, evil will be quickly punished.

"Then I will approach you for judgement, and I will be a swift a witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, and against the oppressors of the hired worker with his wages, the widow and the orphan and the abusers of the alien, and yet do not fear me", says Yahweh of hosts.  
(Malachia3:5)

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Zacchaeus Chilembo is a minister in the UPCS Synod of Zambia, serving at Chipata Congregation. He is a husband to Angela M Chilembo and together they have three sons Emmanuel, Isaac and Zacchaeus Junior. Zacchaeus likes playing guitar during his free time.

## 28 Oct: What does the Lord require of us?

Week 4: Dimensions of Mission

(For a background and summary of the book of Micah go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFEUEcylwLc>)

Micah sums up the situation of the people that he speaks to in these few words: "We are completely ruined" (Micah 2:4)

Widespread corrupt economic practices destroy community and family life. People live in terror, despair, hopelessness and mourning.

Secular and religious leaders whose role is to ensure justice and righteousness "eat" the people. "Prophets" market "God's blessings and peace". They threaten disaster for those who cannot or will not bribe them. No one's family or property is safe.

People's faith is shaken by this experience. Maintaining hope is hard for those living under oppression and experiencing unspeakable injustice. In this terrible predicament we join those who in faith and despair cry out: "How long, O Lord?"

God's simple message spoken through the prophet Micah echoes through the ages for those who long for God to act.

**"The Lord has shown you what is good and what the Lord requires of you."**

**When God seems slow to answer, God is in fact often waiting for us to act.**

God has spoken to and shown us what is required of us. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God is already breaking into this world and eradicating evil.

In order to work together with God we are required to:

**Do justly.**

We all long for justice. But when we have been wronged our longing so easily becomes a hope for revenge.

God's way of **justice** is not about **just us**.

As followers of Jesus doing justly happens when we choose not to repay evil with evil, but to replace evil with good.

**Love mercy**

Justice and mercy together form God's response to human injustice. Justice and mercy work together for good. We who have received mercy, should be abundantly merciful.

**To walk humbly WITH YOUR GOD.**

Humility (or our lack of humility) is shown in all our relationships.

In humility we adjust our route to follow Jesus. We adjust our pace to keep in step with God and to include others. In humility we discover that we can never walk alone.

Through **God's grace, together** we **can do** what God requires. When we obey, we will experience the power of good over evil. When we do what God requires we will see and will witness to God's saving grace in the world.

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has showed you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah6:6-8)

Shona van der Lingen ministers in the Presbytery of East Griqualand and is called to the Saint Columba's Kokstad congregation. She strives to keep growing in all dimensions (except in girth) and is grateful for her two grown daughters, Megan and Tanya.

## 29 Oct: Saved to do good works

Week 5: How can I be more in-tune?

Paul in his prayers for the church of Ephesus soars to the heights in detailed requests for them to grow spiritually.

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul made the church to understand that it is God himself that makes us what we are and gave us new lives in Jesus Christ. We are God's masterpiece marvellously made anew in Christ Jesus.

It is God's plan that we must spend these lives in doing good works. It is not by our own choice nor by our wisdom, but it is by his divine plan for humankind's restoration and redemption.

As children of God we must hold our heads high because we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. We must not look down upon ourselves... We are unique in our own way specially made by God. We are unique creatures that cannot be matched to anything else.

As we were saved by God it is *that* salvation bestowed to us that produces good works. By doing good works we will be acknowledging and showing the worthiness of the love of God to us.

As children of God we know and understand what God wants us to do and it is proper to seek that and live a life worthy of God's calling and live a life that will bring joy to God. And he has already prepared it!

Our lives should be a true reflection of the love God has for us. Whatever we have accomplished in life has been made possible because of the love of God for us. It is only a humble heart that will acknowledge that whoever they are and whatever they have was made possible by God.

As children of God are we living, and will we be able to leave a legacy of good works passable to the next generation? We are urged not to fail in what God has called us to do.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians2:10)

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Reverend Susan Mumba is serving as a minister at Rugare UPCSA, Harare and a mother to Munyaradzi and Mufaro.

## 30 Oct: Faithful Servants of God

Week 5: How can I be more in-tune?

There is always the temptation to turn God's mission field into a theatre or playground where you have actors and spectators; with actors trying hard to outdo the others and spectators shouting in support of their preferred actors.

"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants...".

Paul blames the Corinthians for their weakness and non-proficiency. He observes that those who are sanctified are so only in part, because of the way they conducted themselves. They had mutual quarrels and factions among them upon the account of their ministers.

You can tell the relationship of someone to God by looking at how they relate to their fellow beings. If one is always at variance with his fellow men, if he is a quarrelsome, argumentative, trouble making creature; he maybe a diligent church attender, he may even be a church office bearer, but he is not a man of God. But if a man is at one with his fellow men, if his relationship with them is marked by love, unity and concord; then he is on the way to being a man of God.

The glorification of human leaders is folly. We are reminded here that in God's garden, one may plant a seed, the other may water it, but none can claim to have made the seed to grow. That belongs to God and God alone. The man who plants and the man who waters are all on one level; neither can claim any precedence over the other; they are but servants together for one master - God.

God uses human instruments to bring to men the message of His truth and love, but it is He alone who works the hearts of men to new life. He alone created the heart, so He alone can re-create it.

So as Christians workers, we have different jobs and we see different results, but God is the one who gets the work done. Only God gives the increase. Real faithfulness happens when we're peacefully content with what God has called us to do and thankful for what He has called others to do.

Are you a planter or waterer? Thank God for your calling.

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. (1Corinthians3:5-7)

My name is Jane Moyo Nyirongo, mother to Precious, Terence and Rachel. I'm serving at Garden congregation in Lusaka.

## 31 Oct: Set apart for an exciting mission today

Week 5: How can I be more in-tune?

Acts tells the good news of the founding of the Christian church in Jerusalem and how, when oppression and persecution drove Christians from Jerusalem, the disciples scattered and the church spread to Antioch. Their message was that all people could be free: that Jesus Christ entering the political arena with grace, undeserved love for all who believed, was going to change the world's thinking about how to order a society. Those who could see this new way of having the chains in their life taken off and who could see how collaborating rather than being in competition could radically change their world, were rejoicing.

We are told in Chapter 13:2 how a diverse group of people, including prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria, were singing praises and loving their Lord deeply. The worship service was vibrant. The worshippers adored their Lord, who had turned their life of chains into a life of ultimate freedom. They were singing and proclaiming Christ's salvation, acknowledging Christ's mighty deeds, for they knew their God, their Lord reigns! Acts tells us how absolutely enthralled the gathered community were with their Lord.

Additionally, we read that the worshippers were fasting so that they could be alert to hear what their Lord had to say to them. In this intense loving and holy moment, the Holy Spirit answered: Up until now, the good news of Christ's saving grace was shared with Jews, but now they were called to give the good news to the Gentiles. They were called to broaden their vision and Barnabas and Saul, later called Paul, were called to lead the team to go out and witness to this new way of relating that would change the world.

*Are we willing to worship that deeply and intensely?*

*Are we willing to do what is asked of us?*

(If Barnabas and Saul had said: "Noooo way, this mission is impossible!" just imagine what would have happened? It is not nice to contemplate...)

Are you willing to love the Lord deeply in worship? Are you willing to enjoy the delight in being called to serve the Lord abundantly as your Lord has served you? The Holy Spirit came to those who were praising, those who were honouring, those who knew they would be led to do great things. May your worship be lovely, your listening for the Holy Spirit be deep, and your new mission or continued mission be an exciting venture that will matter and bring new life to those around you.

*Loving Lord,*

*Let us hear once more*

*The greatness of your salvation.*

*Let us speak boldly of your grace,*

*And take hold of your mission to our world.*

*May we honour you now and forever,*

*Amen*

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts13:2)

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Pat Baxter: "I love the passion God gives us to do mission. After 31 years of ordained ministry I am more in love with God than ever. My latest passion is to learn to paint the beauty that God has given us." (Pat serves as the Ministry Secretary of General Assembly)

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