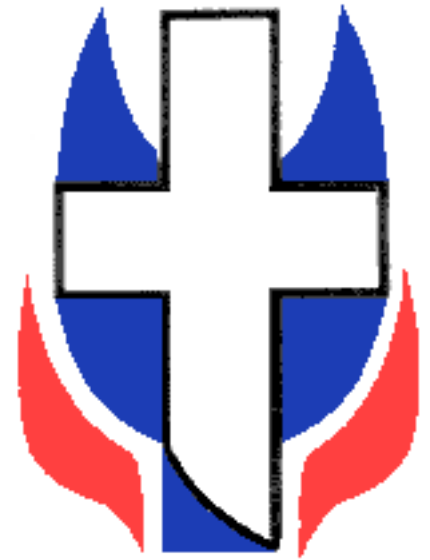


UPCSA - MONTH OF MISSION 2015

WEEK #1: A POWERFUL GOSPEL:



1. The powerful Gospel

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."
(Romans 1:16-17)

At the heart of the Christian's Mission and the Church's Mission is the idea of *Missio Dei* (Latin for "the mission of God".) The Mission of God is to reclaim and rescue a world lost and broken by sin. God started Mission when He walked in the garden asking Adam and Eve where they were. This mission continued when He called Abram and blessed him to be a blessing. It intensified when He revealed His nature and character to Moses and the Israelites in the giving of the Law, when He commissioned a temple that the nations could come to and when He promised Jeremiah that hearts of stone could become hearts of flesh.

God's mission was em-body-ied when Jesus the Son took on flesh and inhabited Mary's womb, lived in our broken world and died on the cross where He conquered sin, death and hell.

God's mission is **Good News** - That's what the word "Gospel" means.

The Good News is that God is reaching for us and that He is mighty to save.

Paul spells it out like this:

- We don't have to be ashamed of the Gospel - it's Good News that was not a product of our imagination or our effort - it was initiated and concluded by God.
- This Good News *saves*. It rescues, redeems, restores, renews, rebuilds and reconciles our broken lives and brings us to God.
- This Good News is for everyone. There are no boundaries.
- This Good News is ours when we put our trust in this God who started reaching out for us long before we even thought about Him.

It's a powerful message and I am "proud"(in the sense of worship not ownership) of the message and the God behind it.

Theo Groeneveld is husband to Brenda, Dad to Caleb, life-lover, cyclist, computer-geek and minister serving Emmanuel Presby in Pretoria East.

2. From death to life.

24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. (John 5:24-25)

Jesus starts both these statements with "I tell you the truth". We see Him say this when He is about to share a fundamental truth – something worth hearing, something which is eternally true. It's almost as though he is saying – if you've slept through everything I've said to you up until now – this is the time to wake up and listen. In the Message Bible interpretation Eugene Peterson writes it as:

"It's urgent that you listen carefully to this!"

What is the news? What is it that we need to hear?

That faith in the sending power of God – believing that He sent Jesus because He loves us enables us to cross from death to life.

We are told in Scripture that without Christ we are spiritually dead: Paul in Ephesians 2:1 says “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...”

When we as mankind chose our own way rather than the way of the Father, we were cut off from the source of life. Before Christ we were a little bit like chickens without heads – running around, not even aware that we are dead, mimicking life-likeness but spiritually without breath or hope.

Ephesians 2:4 concludes that sentence though saying:

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

The moment we believe and trust in the mercy and grace of God – we cross over. Breath is breathed into our nostrils once again – God’s eternal Spirit takes up residence inside us and gives us life – eternal life – abundant life.

Jesus demonstrates his power over death as he raises Jairus’ daughter “Little girl I tell you get up!” “*Talitha koum!*” and with his friend Lazarus – “Lazarus, come out!” and with the widow’s son, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”

They hear His voice and live.

We too have heard his voice call us, and so we live.

Three ways to respond to this glorious truth:

1. If you have yet to respond to the voice of Christ – if you have heard him calling you, respond! Believe! Cross over to Life!
2. Know that our salvation is secure. We have the assurance that we are no longer condemned and no longer dead the moment we trust in a God who reached out to us through his Son Jesus.
3. Rejoice in the GOOD NEWS! We have life – life that is lived in the presence and power of the Spirit of God – life that is eternal!

Amen and amen!

Jackie Barker is a minister serving Emmanuel Presbyterian in Pretoria East. Loves being married to Tim and enjoys being Mom to gorgeous toddler Christine.

3. The powerful testimony of a transformed life

Now while Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of expensive perfumed oil, and she poured it on his head as he was at the table. When the disciples saw this, they became indignant and said, “Why this waste? It could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor!” When Jesus learned of this, he said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a good service for me. For you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this oil on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” (Matthew 26:6-13)

Someone I respect very highly for the practical way in which she shows her faith has a fridge magnet that reads: *Perform random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty.*

John's gospel tells us that the woman was Mary (the sister of Lazarus) and that the perfume was worth more than a year's wages. The disciples were taken aback - this was an expansive gesture - it was *over the top*. We're also told that Jesus' approval of her actions triggered Judas' decision to betray Him.

There is some debate as to whether the account of the sinful woman who anoints Jesus and dries His feet with her hair in Luke 7:36-50 is the same event as this one. Whether it is or isn't, there are still some important thoughts for mission here.

1. If this was an act of gratitude for being forgiven - which is how Luke sees it - it does speak of a changed life - and of a great forgiveness.
2. If this was an act of worship and devotion, it still speaks of great love. This, too, speaks of a changed life. And we love and worship because "He first loved us."
3. Sometimes *senseless acts of beauty* catch people's attention in ways that preaching doesn't.
4. When we lavish love and care on "the least of these" we are doing it for Jesus. When we remember this, then Jesus' comment about always having the poor with us takes on a whole new light - we always have the poor with us and we don't have Jesus' physical presence - so how do we anoint Him and wash His feet? We do it for the poor! (There's a whole sermon in this point!!)
5. Sometimes we need to disregard the budget.

Mother Theresa understood that God calls us to show this kind of generosity to others (sometimes to the person we least expect or who least expects it!) And He may ask us to do it without considering the budget, the precedent we may be setting, or what others may think.

Just as Mary's generosity and service is still talked about, and just as Mother Theresa's generosity and service is still talked about, our generosity and service will create a lasting impression...

4. Antioch - Transformed

When the church in Jerusalem got wind of this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to check on things. As soon as he arrived, he saw that God was behind and in it all. He threw himself in with them, got behind them, urging them to stay with it the rest of their lives. He was a good man that way, enthusiastic and confident in the Holy Spirit's ways. The community grew large and strong in the Master. Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. He found him and brought him back to Antioch. They were there a whole year, meeting with the church and teaching a lot of people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were for the first time called Christians. (Acts 11:22-26)

We live in pretty despairing/hopeless times where it is easy to get discouraged by life. The first topic of conversation at most gatherings is how bad the current political/social/economic climate is and if this is really a place where one wants to live and bring up children in.

Antioch was not much better, it was the centre of several pagan cults and an important commercial city, it was also the base for Paul's missionary journeys. But it was a place where the term Christians (Christ-ones) was first coined and it was vitally important to the early church. So it is to this place that Barnabas arrives and begins transforming the early church.

It is interesting to note that this church had little in common but Christ – it was a diverse church, just like the UPCSA, but a clear illustration of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and the fact that Christ can and does cross all boundaries and unifies His people.

When Barnabas arrives "he threw himself in with them, got behind them", he did not leave the church as it was when he arrived; his job was to transform them – through the power of the Holy Spirit – and as a result of this they grew large and strong.

Our job as Christ-ones is to transform ourselves and others through the power of the Holy Spirit, and this can only be done when, like Paul and Barnabas who stayed in Antioch for a year, we invest our lives in others' lives. Then we not leave them as we found them but we transform them, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Have you helped someone recently believe in Christ?

When was the last time you invested yourself in personally teaching and encouraging a person? Helping them transform into Christ-ones?

Transformation is not a one-time or solitary event, isn't it time we throw ourselves in and get behind them?

Ruth Armstrong is the minister at St Andrews Germiston who is an avid reader and consumer of all genres of books!

5. The Gospel makes new people out of us.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2Corinthians5:17-20)

As we marched against corruption on 30 September 2015, I was thrilled to listen to one gentleman telling his story on why and how he left the mayoral position in one of our South African metros. He claimed that he told his party leadership and his family that he was prepared to leave the position without money but with his integrity intact, as he did everything guided by his Christian conviction. I learned that the gentleman was coincidentally a Presbyterian.

In Revelation 21:5 John records the following statement: 'He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new"'. Paul's statement reinforces this truth: "If anyone is in Christ, he (she) is a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come." The statement is mentioned in the context of the discussion on the ministry of reconciliation, emphasising that the precursor to reconciliation is that we must die from the old self and be raised with Christ and be joined to Christ. That is a great act of transformation by the great transformer.

Christ transforms our lives, so that we become genuine Christians and responsible citizens and members of our societies – people with integrity. With us rooted/joined in Christ, our societies are transformed to be better places for all. The economic, gender and ecological injustices give way to a just, equitable and peaceful society. Our churches become centres of hope and get involved in the business of restoring and guaranteeing human dignity and freedom. New people make a commitment that corruption cannot take place on their watch and in their presence. New people promote the economy of life, challenging the economy that causes a widening gap between the rich and the poor in church and in society. New people witness to Christ alone, the only Saviour and, through the power of the gospel, speak out and defeat the harmful religious practices that are a profanation to the gospel of love and salvation.

"Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear, just because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." New people remain in Christ, are guided by the Word of God and led by the Holy Spirit, and are continuously seeking God's will for us. The Gospel makes new people out of us – people of integrity.

Lungile Mpetsheni is the General Secretary of the UPCSA. He loves family and enjoys singing.

6. The riches of His grace leads to purposeful lives for us

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

A story is told of an elderly couple who lived modestly for many years on their small farm that did not give them so much. Eventually they sold the farm to a developer. Working on a natural feeling, the new owner decided to drill and discovered a supply of oil worth millions of dollars. For years, the couple had lived on untold wealth and never knew what they already have and eventually owned.

This story refers to so many Christian believers who live ignorantly of the wealth they have in Christ Jesus. Living the life of faith unawares of the vast riches they have in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ every believer has treasury of the untold blessings from God. These blessings are immeasurable and eternal; even death can't take them away from believers. They are priceless and no money can buy. These blessings are the riches of divine grace.

God's **grace** is something God does for the benefit of His people just because He loves them, not because of something they have done to earn it. Grace is a gift - it's always totally free. If we accept the pardon that God offers us, not only will we not die, He then gives us a life that will never end. That is God's AMAZING GRACE! God's Grace is "*the power of God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves*". Grace means God's love in action: it means God becoming human so that we may be like him. It means God making Christ to be sin for us, that we may be made the righteousness of God in Christ.

Here on earth we have *good work* to do: We are ambassadors of God hence we must stand up against every form of ungodliness committed against God's people and the creation as a whole. We should fight every form of evil be it corruption, racism, child and women abuse, ecological degradation - the list is endless. Our purpose is to let the kingdom of God come here on earth. That God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are given the ministry of reconciliation; reconciling people with God, each other and nature.

And we believe God is at work in us and in the world: making everything new. And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new" Rev. 21:5

Mukondi is the current Moderator of the UPCSA and a minister of St Mungo's United Church in Diepsloot. He enjoys ministering to the poor, he loves touring, sports specifically soccer and boxing. He loves reading, listening to traditional and African gospel music.

7. A blind man sees with more than his eyes

He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." (John9:27-32)

The story of the man born blind and later is healed by Jesus is intriguing. The theology of the time about healing was simplistic, raising the question of who sinned between the man blind and his parents. Similar attitudes prevail in these contemporary times. The healing of the man born blind was met with the cold climate of unbelief and doubt even after the healing.

The Pharisees of the time questioned the authenticity of the miracle strongly, to extent of insulting sarcastically the healed man. The lame, blind, disabled are all the handiwork of God as Moses was told by God as he resisted the call. He being the sovereign God has power to heal. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus dispels the myth by saying neither the man nor his parent sinned, but that his condition was to bring glory to God.

In John 8:12 Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whosoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." After smearing the mud from the ground, which was mixture of his spit and ground, which is silicate- sand-mud, was sent to go to the pool of Siloam to wash. Some say Jesus made the first spectacles in this action.

This washing changed the man born blind permanently. The Creator-power of the Lord Jesus healed the blind man. He got his miracle which was controversial to the Pharisees' cold unbelief, that rejected the working of God among men. In so doing they declared themselves spiritually blind though physically seeing.

Even today some blinded spiritually fail to see the handiwork of God in our time. In the light of Jesus, you not only get your sight back, but hindsight, your insight and foresight which is all your vision restored.

Spiritual blindness is failing to see what God is doing among us. The man whose sight was healed was bearing testimony to his miracle gift. The gift of sight is wonderful. The perception of

spiritual insight in life, is by seeing God's doing in the inner person by his Holy Spirit in changing him/her through rebirth.

The man born blind defended Jesus and the miracle he did in granting him sight. Jesus opened the eyes of the blind and he can open yours too. you can say together with the man born blind, "whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Robert Munthali is our General Assembly Moderator-Elect and minister of Gooldvil mission Presbyterian church. He loves travelling and reading, blessed with lovely wife and precious children.

8. The Thessalonians were transformed by the Gospel

Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. (1Thessalonians1:4-10)

The film Saving Private Ryan opens with a grey haired World War Two veteran standing before a military grave in Normandy, France. He implores his wife, "Tell me I have led a good life. Tell me I'm a good man", to which she replies, "James you are."

The action reverts some sixty years behind enemy lines in the aftermath of D Day. A crack commando under Captain John Miller is despatched to rescue Private Ryan. They do just that with great loss of life. With his dying breath, Miller whispers "James earn this. Earn it."

The film ends with the aged Ryan repeating his plaintive plea to his wife, whereupon he salutes the grave of Captain Miller, having lived his entire life under the oppressive burden of seeking to prove himself worthy of the sacrifice paid to secure his freedom.

What a contrast to the power of the gospel of God's free grace enunciated by Paul: our sin transferred to Christ and his perfect righteousness counted in our favour. This is no legal fiction as some suggest. That is to misconstrue the heart of God, the nature of sin and the majestic mystery of the atonement where wrath and mercy meet at the cross.

Rather this is the heart of the gospel, changing our status from a child of sin to a child of God. Deserving judgement, we are declared not guilty. Not simply granted amnesty. Not even placed on probation. We walk away free, whiter than snow.

But there is more. The divine judge does not merely say, 'You are forgiven. You are free to go.' That would leave one a spiritual orphan. With tender compassion and infinite love he turns to the erstwhile accused in the dock, 'I want you to come home with me. I want you to be son, my daughter. I want to share my home, to bear my name, to be heir of all I possess.'

This is the gospel, the good news: God's divine transaction, his great declaration as to what he thinks of us. Not only forgiven. That would be grace. Divine love goes beyond that. Adopted by God, united to Christ, we are joint heirs with Jesus with all his rights and privileges!

Two different hymn writers say it better than I ever can:

I dare not trust my sweetest frame

But wholly lean on Jesus' name

On Christ the solid rock I stand

All other ground is sinking sand!

Upon a life I have not lived

Upon a death I did not die

Another's life, Another's death

I stake my whole eternity.

Amen.

Alan Cameron, Evangelical Christ-follower, husband to Cecile, father of three twenty somethings

9. Living a new life

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (NKJV) (Romans 12:1-2)

This passage contains one of the four “Therefore’s” of Paul’s letter to the Romans. These are;

- The “therefore” of condemnation Romans 3:20
- The “therefore” of justification Romans 5:1
- The “therefore” of sanctification Romans 8:1
- The “therefore” of dedication Romans 12:1

This comes not as a command but an appeal to present one’s body. This appeal is motivated by God’s mercies. Not as a result of works or the efforts of a particular sect but because of the mercies of the Lord. When we realize that we are who we are because of the mercies of the Lord it makes us feel the need to give oneself. We are urged to dedicate our bodies to God. Not allowing the members of your body to be used for anything that does not bring glory to God. After all the body of a believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor.6:19-20) God is revealed to the world by the way we use our bodies to do the good work of God (Mt.5:16) We should use our mouth, our head, our hands, our feet to be the carriers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. May this be your prayer that you dedicate your body to God as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, which is your reasonable service. Use your skill, voice creativity etc to further the kingdom of God.

In verse 2 we are instructed not conform to this world. The call is for all believers to reject conformity to the standard of the world. The word world refers to the age (*aion*) referring to the time, period. Do not change to suit the now. There is a saying that if you can’t beat them then join them. But we are called to stand out and not take the position of our world for the sake of peace at the expense of one’s salvation. Your mandate is to convert the worldly to the position of Christ. Instead of conforming we should be transformed (metamorphosis). Total change in thinking and the way we do life because Christ Jesus did not come to adjust our lives but to change us completely and this change must be a continues process. As a person thinks so they are (Prov.3:7.) The mind plays a very important role in decision making and in shaping one’s identity. One’s behaviour is controlled by one’s mind. Let God transform your mind as you read and meditate on his word in this day. That way you will know God’s perfect and beautiful will for your life. Stay blessed. Amen.

Christopher Mkandawire is past moderator of General Assembly, a minister of David Livingstone Memorial Presbyterian Church and a family man happily married to Rhoda for 17 years and blessed with three children.

10. Signpost Lives

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. (2Corinthians 4:7-10)

What do you see when you in a mirror? Do you like what you see? When I look in a mirror I see my outward appearance. What is inside me is seen in what I say and do. I interact with many good looking people. But sometimes the picture I see doesn't reflect who the person *really* is. This I see when I watch them react in different situations, how they speak or what they post on Facebook.

I am busy doing some home DIY. First I started by preparing the walls. I scraped off all of the loose paint and filled the cracks that had begun to show. In one area I found a crack that looked a little bit larger than the rest. I prodded and a piece of plaster came loose. I kept prodding and more plaster came loose. I got stuck in with a chisel and a hammer and when I was done I had exposed brickwork about one by three meters wide. It had been just holding on until I arrived and started to prod a bit.

At first glance my wall seemed fine. But below the surface there was trouble that needed sorting out. Our lives are the same. We need to sort out the inside of our lives so that people see who we really are. We can try to cover up the real person inside but eventually the cracks begin to show. When God is alive in our inside lives it will be evident in what we do and say. It shows that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

A National Geographic article powerfully illustrated this for me. A photo journalist had gone to document some of the families who had lost fathers and brothers and sons to an attack on a village by ISIS terrorists. The journalist was not a Christian but those who had lost their relatives were. He had thought he would be met with people in deep sorrow and despair because of their loss. When he was asked "What surprised you most?" this is what he wrote: "I would expect people would feel very angry and calling for hatred and revenge and attacks, but many of them were very happy. They said their sons and brothers and husbands were martyrs now. They were the sons of Jesus. God had used them to spread knowledge of Christianity, like sacrifices." These people knew and lived Jesus Christ. They were sad but not crushed, not in despair, not abandoned, not destroyed.

Do our lives reflect Jesus Christ and his death?

Are our lives signposts pointing to Christ?

Is his life revealed in our bodies?

When people ask why we are different?

Our lives need to be signposts pointing to Jesus.

Brian Smith - Minister at The Hillcrest Presbyterian Church in Hillcrest, Kwazulu Natal. I love Jesus. I like to mountain bike, I make and build using any medium and I am a geek.

WEEK #2: ANSWERING THE CALL. THE URGENT TASK.

11. Answering the Call

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 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." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

As we reflect on the sending out of Barnabas and Saul (Paul) let us remember that this is another response to the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18f). The Great Commission offers five foundation stones on which Paul and Barnabas built as they brought the church to Asia Minor (modern day Turkey and Greece).

1. The **Audience** of the Commission:

The audience originally receiving the instructions were the eleven *disciples* (learner, follower). We can learn from them the aspect of obedience because carrying out the work demands submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

2. The **Authority** of the Commission:

In the field we need an enablement because the mission is not our mission but God's. Therefore, the authority of the Great Commission is our Lord Jesus Christ (who came, who died, who rose and who will return in glory)

3. The **Assignment** of the commission:

As the commander gives commands to the army, there is always an assignment to be fulfilled by the soldiers. Therefore, commissioning goes with an assignment and the assignment of this mission from Jesus Christ was to "*make disciples*". As a denomination, we have an assignment and that assignment is of making disciples. People ought to see how Christ has influenced our lives in order for them to follow.

4. The **Activities** involved in the commission:

The activities involved in carrying out this mission would involve "*Going, Baptising* and

Teaching." This month we have an opportunity, beloved, of making Christ Known to the world through the proper interpretation of the word of God.

5. The **Assurance** of the Commission:

We are assured of his presence all the time. The assuring promise of Christ in carrying out is "*I am with you always*" even to the end of the age.

The church in Antioch is now the audience of the Commission - not only will two be *sent*, but the congregation will be the faithful *senders*. (Paul will return to Antioch as his "home base" on numerous occasions.) Paul and Barnabas are sent out in authority as the Holy Spirit guided the church to set them apart. Over the next few chapters of Acts we will see Paul and Barnabas carry out their assignment of planting churches and making disciples who in turn make disciples. We see them carry out the activities of going, baptising and teaching and we see the assurance of God's presence - no matter what hardships they face, God brings them through.

As the church let us follow in the footsteps of the disciples and Paul and Barnabas and may His Grace be upon each one even as we serve Him this month and beyond.

CIUTA WABE NAMWE MOSE (GOD BE WITH YOU ALL)

Reverend Jacob Manda is a Minister at Grace Presbyterian Church in Livingstone Zambia. He loves the Lord and Service to mankind is part of his ministry

12. Prayer and mission

36 When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

(Matthew 9:36-38)

It seems so obvious, doesn't it? Yet, I would hazard a guess that on more than one occasion in your personal life and as a leader in the Church you have failed to do it! To "Ask the Lord of the harvest..."

We all know the priority that prayer has in nurturing our personal relationship with God. We read about Jesus praying and conclude that if it is important to him, it is important us. In fact, the disciples, realising the significance of prayer to Jesus and his relationship with the Father, ask Jesus to teach them to pray. The result is the much loved 'Lord's Prayer'. On regular occasions in the scriptures we are encouraged to pray (1 Thess 5:17, Rom 12:12, Eph 6:18, Col 4:2, Phil 4:6) and most often we equate this with our personal prayer life. This is good and right, but it is not the only context in which we are called to prayer.

How often do we pray together, as his disciples, for the ministry and mission field (our immediate context) God has called us to? Prayer is essential, indeed fundamental, if we wish to follow God's lead and seek the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in convicting hearts, healing lives and establishing his kingdom in new places and new ways.

We would be foolish to begin with strategies and analysis and plans for the work God has called us to if prayer, in particular asking God to lead us and send us, does not flavour everything we think and do as his disciples.

So, I would encourage you to be intentional in creating opportunities for the members of your congregation to pray to the Lord of the harvest. The form of prayer is not that important, whether it is regular prayer meetings, or prayer walks, or a focused period of prayer (40 days or a week), or days of fasting and prayer; the point is that prayer is essential, vital, to the work of God's mission in the world. Ask the Lord of the harvest.

Chris Judelsohn is the minister at Midrand Presbyterian Church which meets in the historic St Saviour's building. He is married to Keryn and they have three children.

13. God is Calling you

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. 6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. (Isaiah 6:1-8)

- If you've ignored a ringing phone because you knew who was calling, raise your hand.
- If you've picked up the phone and said something stupid because you thought you knew who it was, raise your other hand.
- If you've stayed at home when you really wanted to go out because you were expecting an important call, smile.
- If you've sat next to the phone waiting for someone to call, kick yourself

Are these not the different kinds of calls that we hear under normal circumstances? Aren't they a qualification of how important a call can be? I am sure that we have all experienced some sort of call or another. And the call of God to Isaiah in Chapter 6 is one of the more famous calls in the Scripture. Isaiah's call comes in the form of a vision, where he sees God way up high on a throne and God's kingly robe being so huge that the hem of it completely fills the temple. There are strange beasts with lots of wings attending to God and proclaiming God's holiness with such power that the temple shook and filled with smoke. Now, most of us cannot claim to have had such an experience – but those of us who choose to pay attention to our spiritual lives, we can often point to several “aha!” moments on the spiritual journey.

The initial one of those, the one that usually propels us to begin the spiritual walk in the first place, is the realisation that the existence of God is a very real possibility. Maybe we had not really considered that before, but something happens that makes us say there might actually be a God, in which case I better pay attention. We might not be sure at that point. We might not know anything about the nature of that God, but God suddenly becomes real enough that we feel compelled to investigate.

After all the shaking and smoking in Isaiah's vision, he cries out “Woe is me! I am lost... yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” When confronted with the glory of God, the first thing that Isaiah becomes aware of is sinfulness – he is scared. I doubt he thinks repentance, but maybe his mind goes, “that's it; I'm in for it.”

But he is not and neither are we. Have you reached a point of basic belief in God? Then believe me you are on a spiritual driveway – and this is your second “aha!” moment in the spiritual journey. That moment is that the God that you just discovered is calling you, by your name – ringing your number, calling on your address and God is calling specifically you.

The Rev Armando Sontange has a blessed calling: Shumikazi calls him Honey, Kwezi, Litha and Khanyo call him Dad. The folks at Kagiso Presbyterian Church call him their Moruti and preacher. And God calls him His.

14. Jeremiah, Come follow me

The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;

I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

6 "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."

7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to
and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue
you," declares the LORD.

9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put
my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and
tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:4-10)

I don't know if you remember when you were called. My memories include a small Scripture Union group when I was 12 when, like Wesley, there was no denying the "warming" of my heart. And a prayer with hands laid on at 16, where there was almost an audible "follow me". However jaded I have felt at times in the ministry, the power of that Call has kept me focussed through these 30 years. What was certain then was that God still calls – it was not only an Abraham and a Moses thing but an enlistment in the service of God's kingdom here and now.

Of all the characters of scripture, the one I would least like to be caught on a desert island with is Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a downer. There wasn't a person or a thing he didn't denounce. Today's reading takes us right back to the beginning, to his Call. The story is classic: "God interrupts someone, issuing marching orders; the recipient resists (usually for very good reasons); God insists, reassures, and empowers. The Call is enveloped in love but the primal response of the hearer is fear. Jeremiah is ushered into something bigger and better, into God's truth and a life of service to the Almighty".

We do not choose God. It is God who chooses us (John 15:16) and God is relentless. Jeremiah is called and appointed "a prophet to the nations". It's not going to be a success story. This is not a career path. Jeremiah is not required to go to Seminary. He is a prophet by the touch of God's hand to his mouth. It's not going to be easy and when you read the story till its end, you wonder whether it was not just torture. God warns of this in the six words God uses to describe Jeremiah's vocation: "To pluck up, to pull down, to destroy, to overthrow, to build and to plant". Only two of the six are positive, the other four are going to be painful. This is going to be brave work.

In our time and in our Church, there is a shortage of prophets. We've side-lined the "naysayers" and forced the trouble makers out. Will we hear the "word of the Lord"? Who will speak it to us? Who will speak truth to power? How will those who have been taken captive by the powers that destroy life be set free? It's time for the prophets to speak up again – to call us back to the "life affirming" Good News of God active in the world today.

George Marchinkowski is colleague minister to St Mungo's United in Bryanston. He is husband to Sascha, father to Leah and Zoe and a student of the Missional Church.

15. The right motive...

16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it (1Corinthians 9:16-18)

Great affordable mission work.

A certain Pastor brought a report to his Church council on the growth and progress in the three newly planted outstations. In the first one, there was growth in numbers from 10 to 30 meeting regularly for worship and Bible studies. In another, which was next to a University campus, there was growth in numbers but it needed regular pastoral care and support. In the third outstation,

the growth in membership was great because of the children's ministry work which was in progress. These three stations were on average 40 kms from the main congregation and about 30kms from each other.

One of the Church council members raised a concern after the Pastor's report. How can we balance the two things which are: the zeal for mission work and the ability to keep the mission work less burdensome to the church?

The Apostle Paul (who wrote our text for the day) was one of the great missionaries and church planters who managed the two well... So often financial issues ("Can we afford it?") hinder mission work. He did not allow unnecessary hindrances to the preaching of the Gospel.

Prayer note:

Lord, help us to make and new ways of doing great mission work without being a burden to your Church.

Amen

Matorofa Mutonganavo is an ordained minister of word and sacraments. He is currently serving as Chaplain of Gloag Mission Schools in Zimbabwe. He loves reading, peace and working with own hands.

16. How can they believe?

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:14-15)

Do you think you have beautiful feet?

These verses form part of a complex chapter where Paul laments the hard-heartedness of the Jews who had not believed the message of the gospel. In the chapter he also describes the communication process and the content of the message.

Let's summarise the content of the message as Paul has it in this chapter:

- You can try to establish your own righteousness through the law (v.3) but then it all depends on a perfect track record (v.5)
- But Christ is the end of the law "so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." (v.4)
- Believing is to "confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord" and to "believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead" (v.10)
- Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (v.13)

So that's the message. *And it's goooooood news!*

But, for a message to be passed along, there has to be a sender, a messenger, a message and a receiver who then understands/believes. Did you notice that Paul describes the same process as I did, but in reverse?

He starts with the receiver, then the message ("the one"), then the preacher/messenger who is sent.

For Paul the one who is sent is important.

He describes them as those with the "beautiful feet" because they bring good news!

People can't hear unless someone is sent.

But how awful it is if the Sender (God) sends, but the messenger never goes.

Let's have beautiful feet!!

17. What is Paul's race? It's preaching the Gospel.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the . (1Corinthians9:24-27)

Life sometimes has us in positions where we have to admit: "I didn't sign up for this!" Some people get to this point when they've had undue pressure in their jobs, or have undergone loss of some kind, or difficulties in relationships, or disappointment with children, or even failure in their studies. If they are lucky, some may leave the difficult situation - but for most, that option is a luxury that they cannot afford because it's part of their job.

The life of every believer proclaims a message. It's part of the job description of being a believer. St Francis of Assisi wisely said, "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." You preach even with your mouth closed. You preach even without ever entering the pulpit. You preach, whether you recognize this fact or not because you preach with your life, your actions, your decisions, your choices, and you preach with your words.

Paul was a preacher who, fortunately, recognized God's calling to run the race of preaching the gospel of salvation to the world. You may or may not be called to the specific ministry of preaching, like Paul, but your life preaches anyway. You may think: "I didn't sign up for this," but proclaiming the word is at the core of what you signed up for when you signed up to being a Christian.

This is why Paul's message is for us all. As Paul advises, there is a need for each one to "strike a blow to my body and make it my slave" (v.27) if we are to win this race. The type of blows to our bodies that Paul is advocating for here involve:

- getting our ego out of the way as we preach (ouch!)
- practising humility in our preaching (ouch!)
- and making our 'sermons' a slave to God's agenda and throwing out our personal agendas (ouch!).

There are benefits to running the race in this way: not only does it transform the hearers of the message, it TRANSFORMS THE PREACHER! The preacher is transformed into the likeness of Christ, the "crown that will last forever" (v.25). What a prize – what a priceless prize!

(Lydia Neshangwe is the minister at St Andrew's Presby in Bulawayo. She is stimulated by the diversity that exists in the world, especially the diversity in the church).

WEEK 3: THE PRACTICALITIES OF MISSION.

18. What the Mission field looks like.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (You can read the whole passage below...) (Acts16:6-40)

We live in a culture that elevates comfort, safety and security above all. We spend our money and time to ensure we have those three things, often at the cost of other things.

The challenge of sharing the gospel in every mission context is that Jesus calls us to live far outside those preoccupations. Paul and Silas land up angering the people to whom they come to minister and they find themselves far from our cultural ideals: hated, beaten and imprisoned - things we take pains to avoid.

As we read the account from the early missional church there are two powerful challenges for us and one remarkable encouragement.

The first challenge is that Paul and Silas are so intent on taking the gospel and so resolved to listen to the Holy Spirit that they are even prepared to risk life and limb to ensure the spread of the gospel of Jesus. They are prepared to risk it all to ensure those who, like the slave girl, are in bondage are freed by Jesus.

The second challenge is that Paul and Silas are singing songs in prison! I can almost imagine them naked and bruised with bleeding lips and swollen eyes. But they're worshipping! The heart of mission is worship and not worship dependant on our circumstances but worship that draws from the goodness of God despite our circumstances. It's worship on an eternal scale because we believe that *"for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*

The encouragement for us is this: that when we're prepared to risk it all, God uses our testimony to win over the unwinnable into his kingdom. This jailer would have been a tough man, a soldier, well practiced in making people suffer and die. He was a man who had seen and done it all and in many ways he was inconceivably far from God. Yet God uses this deeply traumatic situation to achieve his purposes and to give him a second chance. That is good news indeed!

The mission field will rarely be easy. To follow Jesus will sometimes take us far from home; it will always take us out of our comfort zones. But God will use the faithful witness of those who listen to the Spirit's voice to draw his lost sheep home.

O Lord! May we follow wherever you may lead us.

Brent Russell is one of the pastors at Protea Valley Church in Bellville. He is married and has two boys and is passionate about cycling and rock climbing.

19. Service is an important part of this...

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into basin and began to wash his disciple's feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him...

14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13:3-15)

Our theme for this week is: "The Practicalities of Mission."

The highest respect in the Church is not leadership but service.

Jesus' self-knowledge was at the heart of his willingness and ability to serve. Verse 3 says that he knew who he was in terms of where he had come from (the Father), where he was going (back to the Father) and what his role was while he was here.

Jesus was the model servant; he showed his servant attitude to his disciples and to us today. Washing guests' feet was a job for a household servant to carry out when guests arrived. But Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist, as the lowliest slave would do, and washed and dried his disciples' feet.

Jesus under no circumstances wanted to occupy the first place, to be served. He reacted very harshly to all attempts to make him accept kingship of this world! The kingdom of Christ grows where there is an attitude of service, where there is a growing respect for each other, where there is sharing and where new relations are established among people regardless of race or class.

Service has been the keynote of Christian leaders in history. Martin Luther King said: "If any of you are around when I have to meet my day and if you get somebody to deliver the tribute, tell him

not to talk too long. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize; that is not important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards; that is not important. I'd like somebody to mention that day that, "**Martin Luther King tried to give his life serving others.**"

Such whole-hearted services can be hard; conversely, a candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.

Finally: Jesus' self-giving in love is to be imitated by all of us. As he did it, we can do no less. If we don't serve, then our congregations where souls are to be lifted will be empty, while beauty parlours where faces are lifted will be packed. Service is an important part of God's mission; we are consequently called to serve as Jesus served!

Sibusiso Zungu is a servant of God, serving the community of DIEPKLOOF and UPCSА at large.

20. Simple but true.

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

Being a missional church is much more than a church or theological concept. It is about the sensible way that we who love the Lord Jesus are the church, fulfil our calling and make a difference in the world.

Salt was used in biblical times to preserve food. (There were no fridges or freezers to conserve it). We are the church in a world where sin, impurity, disobedience and spiritual decay destroy lives, communities and society. This rot is a real enemy of the church itself, when it destroys our witness and when our way of being church suspends our witness for the holy Son of God and his triumph over spiritual death.

To be the salt of the earth is to preserve the world through living the Gospel by being made holy in Christ.

This same society also seems to be lost. During load shedding we bump against our furniture, cannot find the torch or the matches quickly enough, become disorientated in our own homes and fear the enemies that may lurk in the dark.

Christ Jesus is the light of the world. His Spirit makes his light shine in and through us without any risk of "spiritual load shedding" that will steal our impact on life's murkiness.

So we become the light of the world. Our words and testimony, and more importantly our lives, servanthood, care, outreach and example become a lamp on a stand providing a way out of the haze caused by the confusion resulting from a corrupt world where the dangers of foolishness and disarray destroy lives, families, communities and a nation.

Let us with determination shine the true Light before others. Let's be the church that stops the rot and becomes the GPS for a world in fear, because they lost all sense of direction and the celebration of life.

Let's restore dignity, purpose, joy, festivity, peace, mercy and love!

"This little light of mine – let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!"

Andries Combrink is the minister to Centurion West Presby, husband to Marthie, dad to 3 thirty somethings and proud granddad to the prettiest 10 year old girl he knows!

21. How we have influence.

But in your hearts set apart 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, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (1Peter3:15-16)

Our perceptive elders have said, 'when a lizard basks in the sun it knows it has a hiding-place nearby' (*Dzvinyu kuzambira zuva kuona mwena*). Christians are called upon to be like that lizard that knows its hiding place. A Christian's hiding place should be Christ and that should be the basis of the hope in a Christian's life.

In today's two scripture verses we are told to anchor our hearts on Christ so much so that those who see us will be so astounded by the hope that we get from trusting in Jesus that they ask us for the source of our hope. It is not just about having hope while others do not have it. It is about the quality of the hope that Christians should have. This is a kind of hope that does not avoid adversity but a hope that is based on going through suffering and conquering.

Setting apart Christ as Lord includes acknowledging that the one who was born in oblivion in a crowded town is the one to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess as Lord. It includes acknowledging that the one who was born in poor circumstances is the one worshipped by wealthy people from the east who brought to him expensive gifts. It includes acknowledging that he who has nowhere to lay down his head is the one who owns heaven and earth and all contained there. It includes acknowledging that the one who was wounded transforms wounds into healing instruments. It includes acknowledging that death has no sting anymore because he died to take its sting away and and rose so that death is now effectively dead.

With your heart anchored to such a Lord what can destroy your hope? With a hope that grows from that hiding place, people will want to know what makes you tick, so to speak. With Christ as your Lord you humbly tell the story of this amazing Lord who transforms your wounds and changes, yes, even your death into a germination of something new. Something new that no eye has seen yet. You may be blind to many things in this life but your confidence lies in the one who is Lord in your heart!

So you bask in peace and joy regardless of circumstances because your hiding place is the Rock of ages that was cleft for you!

Paul Neshangwe is a friend who is pastor to Makokoba Uniting Presbyterian Church. He and his wife Lydia are blessed as biological parents to T.C and Melusi and also privileged to be parents to many more!

22. Justice is a powerful gospel tool

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food...

"Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them"...

They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts6:1-7)

This is an important episode in the life of the early church.

There had been an 'incident' in the church's daily life. *And it was a hot potato!* There were widows who were being neglected while others were being cared for... and the neglect was on racial grounds - Jewish women received care, Greek women didn't.

The disciples respond quickly and decisively. They recognise the urgency and they delegate the important task of food distribution to seven men: Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas (who all have Greek names) to right the wrong.

Not only do they take the time to entrust this task to specific people, but they celebrate the spirituality of this practical task: They require that the candidates be filled with the Spirit and then they pray for them and lay hands on them when they are appointed.

I am fascinated by the outcome of this action. When the injustice was addressed in this thorough and godly way, three things happened:

1. The word of God spread
2. The number of disciples increased
3. A large number of priests came to faith.

All this because an injustice was addressed.

I'm especially interested in the large number of priests who were converted by this. Could it be that they were so disillusioned by the corruption and nationalism of Judaism - just think of the money-changers in the court of the Gentiles - that this example of justice, fairness and swift, practical action really touched them?

The church gains great credibility when it acts practically and with deep-spirituality to injustices. This is not party-politics, but the politics of Jesus: Love one another, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, liberate the captives and bring relief to the oppressed.

23. The Church, unlike Israel's failure, should be an attractive signpost to God

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isaiah2:2-3)

The above verses capture the prophet's vision of Israel as the place that will draw God's people together. Israel was chosen for God's purpose: to become a light and signpost to the world of God's presence and hope. God walked with her, brought her out of bondage and hopelessness. But Israel seems to have forgotten that so quickly. She wants to give in to her own desires and wants – forsaking God rather than following God.

The church today has become like the people of Israel refusing to follow our Lord. We want to go our own way, seeking our own agenda and attempting to satisfy ourselves. We need to stop and ask: What does the Lord want? How can we fulfil God's purpose? The Christian church is called to proclaim God's grace and saving love in Jesus Christ to the world. When we fail to maintain our purpose then we lose the value of our message and existence.

We stand at the crossroads of a new world order, economic divides between the rich and the poor, immorality, poverty, HIV, a sexual revolution, secularization, religious pluralism, political corruption, abuse of women and children, gender discrimination and the list goes on. How does the church respond to all these? We need to be brought back to our real purpose as church. We need to proclaim the Risen Christ! We do that best when we are led back to the *cross*. Why? The cross and the resurrection speak of life, hope and victory in the midst of despair, defeat and death. More significantly the cross speaks of suffering love, grace, forgiveness and restoration. It reminds us that Jesus came not to condemn the world but to save it. So our task as church is to reach out to the suffering, sin-sick and lost world and to bring it into the love, grace and peace of Jesus Christ. We must follow the example of our Lord in suffering-love, humility and grace.

The Church as *apostolic* tells us that it is a "called out and sent out community". We are called by our Triune God, blessed by his presence and sent out to call and bless others in His name. We come so that we may "go and make disciples". The church does not exist just for believers; it actually exists for the world: A signpost to lead others to Jesus. The apostolic dimension reminds us that we are a missionary church, the people of God constantly on the march for God. In the words of John Calvin, the church is the "theatre of God's glory". Well, are we? May the Church, unlike Israel, be a signpost to the Glory of God!

Jerry Pillay teaches Church History at the University of Pretoria and he is also President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. He is devoted to God, his family, church, students and research.

24. We need to prompt-able

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." (Acts 8:26-29)

Often when I give an instruction for my children to follow, I get a million questions or complaints... I just wish they would just go and do what I am asking, is that too much to ask of them?? I wonder if God has the same experience with us...

Today's passage speaks about how the angel of the Lord asked Philip to go South on a desert road. Not once in this encounter does Philip question God or the angel as to where exactly or why. In fact even to this day it is not entirely clear why Philip was asked to do this, why he was asked to speak and expound the Word of the Lord or even baptise the Ethiopian eunuch. Of course I would love to speculate that this eunuch went on and many people were converted also, and maybe even the "Queen of the Ethiopians". But the text does neither confirm or deny this fantasy.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to be like the disciples who left everything to follow Jesus?

How would we react today to such a request? For me it would need something amazing like an angel for me to even consider the request.... what about you?

Often I pray, "use me Lord..." perhaps I need to reconsider this dangerous offer.

Lord, help us to be open and aware of the different ways you call us. Help us to be able, like Philip to do what you ask of us.

Amen

Melanie Cook, wife, mother and minister at St Giles Presbyterian Church, Chaplain to the Moderator of General Assembly.

WEEK 4: OVERCOMING THE BUMPS AND BARRIERS

25. The clarity of the message is very important

Some men came from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. (Acts 15:1-2)

In the first verse of the Book of Acts, Luke gives a very clear yet subtle clue as to the main topic of his second volume. The Book of Acts (his second volume) is about the ongoing ministry of Jesus. In Acts 1:1 Luke indicates this by stating that his former book (Luke's Gospel) is only about what Jesus "began" to do and teach. Acts will trace Jesus' ministry onwards and outwards "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In the light of Jesus' ongoing ministry, the role of the disciples is to be "witnesses" of what they see and hear of Jesus' work and teaching (Acts 1:8).

When a controversy arose over the question of circumcision or non-circumcision of Gentiles, as seen in Acts 15, the way that the Christian leaders handled the situation was to go back and together trace how Jesus had been at work and what pointers the work of the Holy Spirit gave on this issue. As they strove to be faithful witnesses of Jesus' ongoing presence and involvement in the world their attention was drawn to what had taken place when Peter had been invited by Cornelius the Gentile, to visit him in his home and to minister to him, his wider family and Gentile friends. After listening attentively to the discussions and testimonies, James summed up the

conclusion that they came to as follows: "Simon (Peter) has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself... It is my judgement that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." In this way the church collectively identified what God was doing and as a consequence, aligned itself with the ongoing ministry of Jesus.

The end of the Book of Acts is left open ended without giving a clear conclusion to either Paul's ministry or his life. This open ending is a subtle reminder to all of us today that the challenge of being witnesses of Jesus' ongoing ministry still applies. Jesus' work and ministry has never come to an end. Today, the issue of whether to be circumcised or not is resolved but other new and just as pertinent issues face us.

To be a missional congregation or church is not a question of having new and fancy programmes, but for Ministers and Sessions and each Christian, like the early Apostles, to discern where and how Jesus is at work in one's context and to align one-self and one's congregation with the ministry of Jesus.

Eddie Germiquet is Ministry Secretary of the UPCSA and is closely involved in the selection and training of candidates for the ministry. He was ordained in 1978 and prior to his present position ministered in a number of congregations including St Paul's (East London); Fort Beaufort (Eastern Cape); Meyrin Protestant Church (Geneva) and Durbanville (Western Cape). He is married to Lauren and has four grown up children.

26. We need the boldness and power of the Holy Spirit

7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline...
(2Timothy1:7-9)

Now evidently, Timothy became a little fearful in the exercise of his gifts And I think that FEAR is a tool that Satan often uses to discourage our exercises of the gifts of the Spirit. "I don't know what people are going to think, you know, if I say that to them." And we have his fear that many times restricts us from the exercise of gifts. But "*God hasn't given us the spirit of fear; but of power, love, and a sound mind*" (2Ti 1:7). Spirit of power. Oh, thank God, the spirit of love, how important, and a sound mind.

"*So...Do not be ashamed then of the testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but share in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God*" (2Ti 1:8)

Now there are a lot of situations where we can just keep our mouths shut and stay out of trouble when we really ought to be opening our mouths and getting *into* trouble. You know, when people are saying blasphemous things we can just keep our mouth shut and sort of shrug. Or we can say to them, "Do you realize what you are saying? What a filthy mouth you have! Doesn't it bother you to have such a filthy mind and mouth?" Can we be bold enough to say to people when they are using the name of Jesus in a blasphemous way, "Hey, that hurts me. You're talking about a man who I love more than anyone else, who died to save me from my sins, and it hurts me to hear you talk about Him that way." Well, people sometimes get upset and they, look like, "Who do you think you are?" you know, and all that kind of stuff.

But yet Paul tells Timothy that "God has given us the spirit of power, of love and of a sound mind." Therefore, don't be ashamed of our Lord but be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel. "They who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Let us overcome the bumps and barriers through boldness and power of the Holy Spirit.
SHALOM

Jane Nyirongo is Minister Garden Presbyterian in Lusaka Mchinga Presbytery. Moderator synod of Zambia. Proud mother of three, and grandmother of four. Served the Lord in full time ministry for 26 years.

27. It remains a decision that everyone must make

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

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

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

John paints Nicodemus as a seeker... Nicodemus has been to see Jesus at night in ch.3, he protests that the Pharisees want to condemn Him without a hearing in ch.7 and then comes with an armload of spices (enough spices for a king) to bury Jesus in ch.19.

Jesus gets straight to the point with Nicodemus: "You must be born again!"

We've heard many sermons on being *born again*...

A couple of years ago Rich Mullins asked a very penetrating question: "Did Jesus, the apostles or Paul ever ask anyone else to be born again???"

The answer is no.

Jesus asked the rich young ruler to sell all he had.

He asked the woman at the well to tell the truth about herself.

He asked the man born blind to take a courageous walk across town.

He asked Zacchaeus to host a meal.

He asked Peter to throw out a net.

It would seem that Jesus approaches everyone uniquely.

Let's think about Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council. His world was law, rules, regulations, stipulations, legalism, self-(earned)-righteousness. In his world there was no such thing as a free lunch. Grace (God's Riches At Christ's Expense) didn't fit into his world. Jesus tells him to be *born again*. "There's a whole new world for you Nicodemus! A new way of seeing things and doing things. A whole new way of thinking and living. A world that is not self-(earned)-righteousness, but grace. You're going to have to be like a new-born baby - seeing new things and learning new ways..."

Very often the things that have the deepest roots in us are the things that can get in the way of knowing Jesus: The young ruler's money, the well-woman's painful past, the blind man's safety, Zacchaeus' fear of people, Peter's pride in his fishing-competence and Nicodemus' comfortable world of behaviour-and-reward.

Jesus wanted them to let go of these things that they could find Him.

28. Joshua reminds us of the stakes (costs, risks, price)

Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua24:14-15)

Joshua exhorts the people to choose whom to worship between the living God whom they witnessed doing wonderful things for them not once or twice and the gods whom their ancestors worshipped whilst they were still on the other side of the river. In doing so, Joshua was aware of the risk (of rejection) he was taking and the price he might pay for urging these people to make a choice.

The radical question he posed needed a radical response that would transform their lives. The question called the people to do some introspection *and* repent from their evil ways to

experience the constant presence of the living God as they sincerely served Him. Joshua was able to risk because the time ("this day") to do so had come; the moment of truth had arrived. Joshua urged them to choose, fear and serve God with sincerity and in truth.

God always gives us the opportunity to choose the kind of life or way we want to lead. Like Joshua, the Israelites were given liberty to choose which God they were to worship but He also indicated the consequences. If one is called by God, one must be ready to proclaim God's prophetic message which causes change and may call one to die or lose popularity amongst one's people.

I believe that God is asking us to be bold enough to pose questions such as these to all of God's people so that it serves as a yardstick to measure how committed are they in serving God; how ready are they to repent from doing evil things so that they are assured of Him dwelling amongst them.

We live in the days where in many ways the moral crisis manifests itself in common manifestations such as murder, rape, robbery and theft, women and child abuse, domestic violence, drug trafficking, fraud and embezzlement of public funds, crooked business dealings as well as manifestations that are more subtle such as devaluation of people, racism, the breakdown of family as a fundamental social institution, the gap between the haves and have-nots, laziness, individualism and selfishness, lack of will to resist evil, perverted religious beliefs etc. Like Joshua we are challenged to urge God's people to be decisive in repenting, fearing and serving God in all sincerity and truth because God had seen them through so many hardships and difficulties and they themselves are witnesses to His mighty and wonderful acts. We are all challenged to make a choice between good and evil, between light and darkness, between life and death, between a narrow path to heaven and a broad way to hell, and between earthly and heavenly things. To God be the Glory!!

Micah Nthali, serves St.James-Matsulu as a part time Minister and St.Paul's-Marite as Interim-Moderator. He is husband of Rachel and dad to Mlungisi and Siyabonga. They are a family that loves God.

29. Think about the next generation

We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD,
and his might, and the wonders that he has done.
5 He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children,
6 that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,
7 so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;
8 and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God. (Psalms 78:4-7)

Sometimes we become overwhelmed by the apparent gulf that exists between the generations and we are also swayed by the siren call to be "relevant."

The new generations seem so different; they certainly have a different outlook and approach to life. We are concerned for them and wonder: "What can we tell them that is of value?"

"How can they be empowered in a way that will bring transformation?"

This passage gives us instruction and profound encouragement to this end.

A rich heritage of truth has been faithfully passed on from our fathers. Perhaps, if we were fortunate, our earthly fathers shared this heritage with us but it certainly came from those who are our fathers in the faith. God spoke to these fathers, our forebears, and they received these truths from Him. They inclined their ears and heard, they tasted and discerned and they lived it.

We received this testimony from them and now we too know the truth. God established this testimony, it is His, and it is a glorious gospel.

Today this passage urges us to remember this and eschew vain modernisation. This is no time for theological innovation, the teaching of the fathers is God's own and His Word resonates with authority and life. Whatever caused you to want to hide these truths? What are the implied consequences of not passing these truths to the next generation?

God commands us in earnest, and His instruction is prefaced with His love, even for those unborn. Let us faithfully pass on what we have received and train our children for obedience and hope in Christ Jesus. If we humbly communicate to others what we have received according to our Lord's explicit command, a generation will be transformed.

What will it be then?

Let us engage the Lord in faithful obedience today

Jeremy Smith is the minister at Pinetown Presbyterian Church. He loves his family, recreational horticulture and occasionally baking bread.

30. We need perseverance

I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. . . I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God through Christ Jesus, is calling us. (Philippians 3:12-14)

"We may be knocked down but we are never knocked out."

2 Corinthians 4: 9 (JB Phillips trans.)

Mental toughness.

A 100 years ago the famous Polar explorer, Ernest Shackleton, was looking for men to join him on a tough expedition to Antarctica. The story goes that he placed an advert in a prominent newspaper:

"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success."

5000 men and 4 women applied.

I've never thought of ministry in such Shackletonian terms but when I tell the Shackleton story (as I often do) I sometimes include the St. Paul story and speak about the need for mental toughness and emotional resilience, for the work of ministry needs both - in large quantities!

Writing from the depressing surroundings of a Roman jail Paul tells his friends in Philippi to keep going forward, to "press on". His words were carefully chosen. Ministry was getting tougher and tougher. He had suffered major setbacks that had felt like punches in the solar plexus. "Knocked down", he says. Down he went, his wind gone. What now? Does he lie and wait for the count out or does he rise to fight again?

We've all been there. We know what it is to want to throw in the towel and walk away, but ministry has taught us not only to dwell deep but to dig deep. It was Paul's battle-hardened testimony that though he had been "knocked down" many times, he had never been "knocked out".

So, to those courageous souls who have been knocked down and for whom ministry has been tough going, listen to Paul in the reading above: i. press on, ii. keep your focus, iii. let go of the past, iv. pursue excellence ('perfection') and never lose sight of your Goal.

(James Gray is based at the Hermanus United Church and believes that a day away from Hermanus is a wasted day.)

31. We need power from on high

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit (Zechariah4:6)

The historical background to this Old Testament passage is that the Israelites had returned from exile in Babylon. They were a defeated and broken people and it fell upon the king Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua to rebuild the temple. This was a task that was deemed impossible: The people were demotivated, the city was in ruins, and the skilled artisans had remained in Babylon.

God gave Zechariah a vision and a promise that the task could be completed, but it required a change of mindset: they had to put their trust in the powerful working of the Spirit and not in human strength and effort.

The vision: A lampstand with seven wicks, each of the wicks with its own channel to the bowl of olive oil and either side of the bowl were two olive trees.

The implication: The olive trees would supply the bowl endlessly, and perfect light (seven implies perfection) would come from this lamp.

The application: Zerubbabel may not look like much, but he will be endlessly supplied by the Holy Spirit. Our own strength fades and our best efforts end in the sputtering flame of our limited endurance, but we can have the strength to press on and endure when God's Spirit keeps us going.

The vision has no rush in it, the trees stand firmly, the oil seeps into the channels and the lamps keep burning. When we stay in communion with God, His Spirit will fuel our work for Him.

It's not by OUR might, not by OUR strength, but by HIS Spirit!

There comes a time when we have to admit our inability to manage a task on our own. It is then that we must rely on God's help to accomplish the work He has given us to do. We must be clear here: God does not give us the power of His Spirit for us to accomplish tasks that we want to achieve. He gives us the energising power of His Spirit to help us achieve the things He has called us to.

Paul reminded the Ephesians that the power of the Holy Spirit working in them was the same power (Greek word *dunamis* which is where we get *dynamite*, *dynamic*, and *dynamo* from) that raised Jesus from the dead.

If we identify something God wants us to do and we choose not to put our faith in our own schemes and plans, then we can expect that God will do even more than we can ask or imagine. The famous missionary Hudson Taylor said: *God's work, done God's way, will not lack God's supply.*

Soli Deo Gloria!