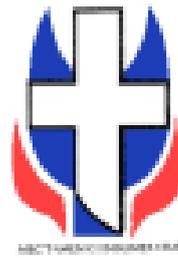


## Month of Mission 2017



THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

# *Dedication*

*It was a shock to receive the news of the sudden passing of the Rev Abraham Nkhata on the 9th of September this year. Abraham was a faithful and hard-working member of the UPCSA's Mission and Discipleship Committee. He also served as the Convener of M&D for the Synod of Zambia and always attended to his tasks as Convener with diligence and excellence.*

*He was the minister at John Knox Presbyterian Church, Ndola, in the Copperbelt Presbytery and he will be sorely missed by the UPCSA.*

*On behalf of the Assembly M&D Committee, I would like to dedicate this past month's readings and devotions to Abraham's memory. His wife, Rhoda, and children remain in our prayers. "Well done, good and faithful servant."*

*Chris Judelsohn, Convener of the Mission and Discipleship Committee*

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# *Introduction*

Welcome to the devotions for the Month of Mission 2017.

The preaching series and Daily Readings for our 2017 October Month of Mission concentrate on Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God, particularly the parables of the kingdom and, in particular, the image of wine and wineskins.

The Gospel is always "new wine" - the love and grace it reveals are so transcendent that it can speak to all times and cultures. We need new wineskins to bring this wine to our rapidly changing world. The Kingdom Jesus describes and that is demonstrated in the the New Testament is a vibrant missional vehicle -- it is the wineskin.

All of this points towards the significance of the Reformation and the 500th anniversary of Luther's significant act at Wittenburg -- a new wineskin was needed -- which is why the Sundays will focus on the "five Sola's" of the Reformation -- they represent the wine and the Kingdom is the wineskin.

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# 1. *Sola Gratia*

9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1John4:9-12)

"Sola Gratia" means "by grace alone".

I use this passage when I do marriage prep with couples. For me, the well-loved 1 Corinthians 13 tells us how to love, but 1 John 4, tells us what love is.

According to John, God is love, and He always makes the first move.

- When we were far away - He brought us near (Eph2:13)
  - While we were still sinners - Christ died for us (Rom5:8)
  - When we were dead - He made us alive (Eph2:4-5)
  - When we were lost - He came to find us (Luke 15:4)
  - When we were blind - He opened our eyes (John 9:25)
- (And I could go on...

God makes the first move - He takes the initiative again and again. The Old Testament is a story of God looking for Adam and Eve, rescuing Noah, calling Abraham, calling Moses, rescuing Israel from Egypt, calling David, sending the prophets and promising the Messiah.

And we don't deserve it - God owes us nothing - but He gives us *grace*. The Hebrew word -- *chêsed* - "loving-kindness" is the word that most consistently reflects God's grace.

Norman Snaithe, a famous OT theologian, said this about *chêsed*: "The word stands for the wonder of his unfailing love for the people of his choice, and the solving of the problem of the relation between his righteousness and his loving-kindness passes beyond human comprehension."

John uses the Greek word "agape" to describe God's love but I can't help but wonder if he would have used *chêsed* instead of *agape* if he could have mixed his languages.

Look at what God's Love -- Loving-Kindness -- Grace does:

1. It takes the initiative -- God shows His love to us long before we do anything for Him (We are undeserving)
2. It gives -- God sent His Son into the world so that we could live (He showed us what God is like -- John 10:10)
3. It sacrifices -- God sent His Son to be an atoning sacrifice. (at-one-ment is how God makes us one with Him)
4. It transforms us -- We can love and become agents of grace.

500 years ago Martin Luther nailed a letter to a church door in Wittenburg. He had tried to get near to God by good works and failed. When he read the Bible he discovered that God had already made the first move: He offered us grace.

1. He took the initiative
2. He sent His Son
3. He died for our sin
4. He makes us new.

It is by **grace alone** that we are saved.

## **2. Levi's unique outreach programme**

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. 10 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'?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." 14 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. 16 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. 17 Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." (Matthew 9:9-17)

When Matthew gets called to follow Jesus, he immediately throws a party and he invites all his friends. As a tax collector, your friends are few and certainly not going to come from the righteous, pious, upright citizens of society. Tax collectors were outcasts in their own community, considered turn-coats and extortionists. So as we are told Jesus and his disciples are invited to this party filled with other "tax collectors and sinners".

This -- unsurprisingly -- throws off a number of people. Firstly the Pharisees bent on being seen as righteous and honourable cannot understand how Jesus can be publicly seen eating with this riff-raff. And then John's disciples also cannot understand the partying... where is the religious fasting?

Jesus finally tells a parable of wineskins in the hope of creating understanding. He tells them of something they would all have understood in the culture of the day. Wineskins were made of animal skins, skins that would become brittle and hard as they aged. New wine ferments and expands -- and so if you put new wine into old wineskins, the wine ferments, expands, puts pressure on the skin and it breaks. New wine skins are needed for new wine.

But what is he really saying?

The new wine is the gospel. The gospel of Grace that requires trust and faith in Christ as Lord, trust in His saving power and a realisation that we cannot in our own strength save ourselves. The wineskin is how this message is carried into the world. The legalism displayed by both the comments of the Pharisees and John's disciples are old wineskins -- they cannot carry this good news in the format of laws and moral behaviour.

The mission of Jesus was to be the doctor to those who needed new and he brought it to them in the wineskin of grace and acceptance: Eating and drinking with the outcasts and misfits of society.

This is what Luther recognised as well as he nailed his 95 theses to that door five hundred years ago. The wineskin of the church had gotten old. The message of Grace had been lost and new wineskins were needed.

Today the challenge for us is -- how are we bringing wine to the world? What do our wineskins look like? Are we reaching out like Jesus did? Do we meet with and connect with people who look different and act different to us? Do we extend love and grace and acceptance even where it isn't earned?

I pray that this mission month God may open our eyes to see possibilities and places where this beautiful wine of the gospel may be shared.

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Jackie Barker is a wife to Tim and mom to her sunshine daughter Christine (3) and her gorgeous son Jesse (1). She is blessed to minister to the congregations of Emmanuel and Grace Presby in Pretoria East.

### **3. The power and reach of the King His Kingdom.**

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed, and he healed them. 25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.  
(Matthew 4:23-25)

The Gospel writers differ slightly when they tell us about how Jesus' ministry began. Matthews says that it is after Jesus was baptised and after he spent a month and a bit on spiritual retreat in the wilderness. Mark agrees with him while Luke inserts the Nazareth rejection before Jesus' ministry begins proper. John marks the start at the wedding at Cana of Galilee.

Whatever the start was, the healing of the sick and the preaching of Good News was what Jesus did right from the start and that's what he was doing pretty much up to the time he was arrested. Healing and telling the Kingdom's story - that's what Jesus did.

Whenever I read the Gospel stories, I can't help wondering if the healings Jesus did were not simply his way of pushing back the fall (of Genesis 3), showing us the health and vitality we would have had if only we'd not strayed from Grace. It was the healings and the Good News he brought that drew the crowds.

500 years after the Reformation Revival, we find ourselves at a Spiritual crossroads again. The Good News is still powerful and healing is just waiting to break through. But the Reformation Church has become just as cumbersome as the Medieval Catholic Church and, again, the faithful long to be reformed.

Today, discipleship is what we hunger to experience and the Spirit is turning us toward the people of the world who have found no home inside the church.

When Pope Francis was a bishop in Brazil he addressed a workshop of priests:

*So I then told the priests: "If you can, rent a garage and, if you find some willing layman, let him go there! Let him be with those people a bit, do a little catechesis and even give communion if they ask him". A parish priest said to me: "But Father, if we do this the people then won't come to church".*

*"But why?" I asked him: "Do they come to mass now?" "No", he answered.*

*And so! Coming out of oneself is also coming out from the fenced garden of one's own convictions.*

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(George Marchinkowski serves St Mungo's United Church in Bryanston, is married to Sascha and father to Leah (12) and Zoe (9). George enjoys helping the UPCSA explore how to be a Missional through the Project for Missional Congregations.)

#### ***4. A really surprising Kingdom and its King.***

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

He said:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:1-10)

This is the Month of Mission, where the Church (UPCSA) is reminded of God's Mission to the world. This Mission of God cannot be carried outside his will, we all have to be in line with the will of God, to be able to reach the world for Christ.

Jesus re-establishes the standard of God's Kingdom and calls us to measure up. The world says going up the ladder is the most important aspect of life, no matter how you get there, and God in the beatitudes says being victimised as a child of God is a Divine Kingdoms ideal. Every kingdom has values and principles that guide its people. God bestows his richest blessings on those who are poor; on those who mourn; on the meek; on those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; on the merciful, the pure at heart, the peacemakers, and all those who are persecuted because of their faithful witness. Jesus is saying putting other people first is vital for the Kingdom of God. For us, who are in the Kingdom by Grace (Sola Gratia), we are called to see other people as better than ourselves, to attract them to the Kingdom of God.

When a person is on a Mission, everything stops and the journey to complete the mission becomes a priority. Mission is priority for the saints, for the world is waiting to receive Christ. Being poor in the spirit means a person who relies on God wholeheartedly. Mission begins with God and is about God and it ends with a relationship with God.

What are the qualities needed to strive for righteousness of God? We need to be poor in spirit, allow God's will to lead our way. We need to mourn for those who do not yet know Christ for we shall be comforted. We need to be humble and kind toward one another and the world, for us to inherit the world by having communion with God through Jesus (Solus Christus). Our goal should be righteousness. The world no longer wants to (only) hear about the Kingdom, they want to see it.

The Kingdom of God reforms our lives for the benefit of the Kingdom. Humility is the key.

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Lentikile Mashoko is a husband to Tumi, a father to Koketso, Rorisang and Bohlale. He serves at Mabopane Presbyterian Church.

## **5. Kingdom activities, compassion, urgency and call**

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

36 When he 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."

1 He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. (Matthew 9:35-10:1)

Often this passage is used to emphasise the kingdom rule of God as characterised by signs and wonders. A significant display of power, some might say. And it's not hard to see how this can be the main focal point of our text for today. After all, Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom, "healing every disease and sickness". Then, in chapter 10:1, he sends out his disciples with great "authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness."

On the other hand, some find the focus in verse 38 and 39: The harvest is great, but the workers are few. "So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields." There could not be a more mission-focussed statement. I think we can all agree that the Gospel needs to be proclaimed far and wide.

However, our attention is drawn to what could easily be read as a passing thought sandwiched between the perceived need for power and personnel: Jesus saw that the crowds: "were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Nothing about the world in which they lived offered security or a sense of peace. The presence of the Roman occupiers certainly didn't help. Neither was there any comfort or guidance to be found in the religious leadership of the day. In a community where care was high on God's agenda, very little could be found.

It seems that as we respond to the call to tell others about Jesus, that power and authority will be trumped by the desperate need in people to know that someone genuinely cares.

As Jesus ministered in great power and glory, it was always with compassion. When he saw them harassed and helpless, floundering without someone to provide real, lasting, spiritual and practical care, he had compassion on them.

Yes, we should pray for needs as we encounter the lost. Yes, we must take the opportunities that present themselves to tell the gospel story. But more than that, it always needs to be done with compassion. And Compassion is rooted in a genuine love for God and our fellow human beings.

May God help us to remember that old adage: "People won't care how much we know (dare we add, how much we pray for them and tell them the gospel), until they know how much we care."

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Mike Muller, husband to Louise, Dad to Jethro and Jessica and scuba diving enthusiast, serving at St Kieran's Presbyterian Church in Fish Hoek, Cape Town.

## 6. *The proclamation of the kingdom*

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. 9 Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; 10 take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. 11 "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. 12 As you enter the home, give it your greeting. 13 If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. 15 I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. 16 I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. (Matthew 10:5-16)

Reformed theology teaches us that Christians are in the world to make a difference through building a community of believers. This month we celebrate 500 years of God's love in action.

In his book Jesus of Nazareth, Pope Benedict tells us that "the phrase 'Kingdom of God' occurs 122 times in the New Testament" and that 99 of these are found in the three Synoptic Gospels and 90 of the 99 texts report the words of Jesus.

Our text for today helps us to understand what it means to proclaim the Kingdom of God as we watch the Commander in Chief give orders to the twelve. It is clear from this command that they were not on their own. This was not their mission. This was God's mission and they were God's men. The Church of God is on a mission of proclaiming God's Kingdom.

One of the "Reformation solas", **Solus Christus** (Christ alone), helps us to understand that the Kingdom is not a thing, it is not a geographical dominion. It is a *person* and that person is Christ. On this interpretation the term "Kingdom" is itself a veiled Christology. Jesus leads men and women to realise the overwhelming fact that in him God himself is present among them, that he is God's presence. As the church we are sent to the world to be ambassadors of his missional work. This is exactly what happened with the twelve. The Kingdom of God resides in the heart of men and women who he calls.

Daniel 2:44 tells us that the "the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom that will never be destroyed". In this text in Matthew we learn that Jesus called disciples and sent them to the world to build God's Kingdom. As the church we are called to build this Kingdom amongst the nations.

We also learn in this text that the Kingdom of God is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God's authority. Those who defy God's authority and refuse to submit to him are not part of the Kingdom of God. In contrast are those who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, who gladly surrender to God's rule in their hearts and who are part of the Kingdom of God. Let's surrender all and follow him to build his Kingdom.

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Madoda Mfene is the Minister at Tiyo Soga Memorial in Langa Cape Town. He's married to Noxolo Mfene and is the father of two boys Chulumanco and Liyema, one daughter Lihle. He enjoys sport, reading and travelling.

## 7. ***Keys of the Kingdom***

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hade will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:13-19)

### **He is Christ, the anointed and the greatest.**

Caesarea Philippi was at the boundary of the Gentile world, He chose this Gentile place to reveal himself for a good reason, that He is Christ for all with an inclusive agenda. He asked His disciples, what people were saying as to His identity. The replies ran from John the Baptist, to Elijah, to Jeremiah, to one of the other prophets. To the average person this meant that he was like any good leader, good but not the best, great, but not the greatest, a prophet, but the "*the Prophet*" this response meant he was just the ordinary not the extra ordinary.

When he asked Peter who they believed He was, Peter replied "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*". In other words, He was that divine, promised and long-awaited Messiah. This brings a challenge to us even today: how do we know Christ Jesus? As our saviour or another historical character in the book called the "Bible".

Jesus Christ promised that "*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*" here the rock is Peter's confession that Christ is the Son of the living God, the truth on which the church is founded. If we have this same kind of confession, we may confidently conclude that in him we are elect as God's children and sharers in the kingdom of heaven.

### **Reformation and the keys to the kingdom of heaven**

Jesus Christ also said to Peter "*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven*" That did mean that Peter was given authority to admit men and women in heaven, because we are saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ - *Sola Fide*, and we are saved by grace of God alone -- *Sola Gratia*. The kingdom of heaven on earth, was brought by Jesus to his disciples in a new wineskin. These keys were not given to Peter exclusively, but as a representative of all disciples (Matthew 18:18) where this promise was given to them all. Therefore let us go out there and lead others to the Kingdom of heaven.

### **Conclusion**

Let us remember that during Martin Luther's time in the Indulgence Controversy some religious leaders thought they had the keys of the kingdom and created the impression that they can keep others away. If we share in the grace of Christ Jesus, we will be united with him, Christ will live in us, and little by little we will be renewed through Christ living in us.

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Thembinkosi Nopapaza, husband to Bulelwa, serving at Johannesburg Presbyterian Church.

## **8. *Solus Christus***

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. (Colossians 1:15-22)

As Paul writes to the Colossians he is addressing an audience comprising Judaists, false teachers and the general people. He is taking the good news of Jesus Christ to them.

Rather than attacking each peculiar belief point by point, Paul countered with a positive theology. The principles he outlines can be used today to judge new cults. "Christ is enough," Paul declares. He is God, the fullness of God, the one who made the world, the reason that everything exists. Paul emphasised that all the mystery and wisdom one could ask for are found in the Person of Jesus Christ. Hence, there is no need to look elsewhere.

Paul's motive was to take out the old system that had vested power in mere human beings, restoring worship to its rightful place, that is, the body of the Church and Christ its head. As he talks about reconciliation and the blood of Christ atoning all he is saying there is a new order of doing things lets get away from the old ways. In this new order your blemishes and alienation is taken away by the death of Christ on the cross. Away with our old ritualistic way of cleansing ourselves.

To fit into this one has to accept Christ as he is all and everything. This has reflections on Jesus' parable on old and new wine skin. The new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah. And is outright missional in all senses, as he takes the gospel to them. The mission let Christ alone be known in His fullness to all people of all backgrounds and inclinations. Paul is at pains to describe who Christ is, so that they can believe. Thus, a mission for everyone who is a Christian.

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Elias Simango, husband to Medury. Blessed with three children, Mitchel 15, Arnold 11 and Junior 7 months old. Serving at Dzivarasekwa Congregation in Harare.

## **9. Kingdom Parable#1 -- Seeds and Sower**

1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 13:1-9)

This month of Mission also coincides with the 500 hundred year celebrations of the Reformation. The 31st of October in particular, is the day to reckon with, when 95 Thesis were pinned to the Church door in Wittenberg in Germany. These were the statements that exposed the Papal sales of indulgences as a fallacy, bringing about the reformation movement as we now know it. It only takes a spark to get the fire going.

Jesus the master teacher and preacher used illustrations, parables, analogies to address the audiences of his time. In the parable of the sower, He compared his hearers to four types of soils and the receptivity of the gospel seed into the inner soul, are concepts that demand an understanding that evokes faith. The narrative approach is still as effective as it was in Jesus time. The missionary person is someone sent by God to carry the seed of the word, to spread it as he/she teaches and preaches.

The result and reaction of the different soil types are prototype of human types and their responses to the gospel imperative of God's kingdom calling. The preacher/evangelist spreads the seed of the word relying only on the one who sent him to give the increase. You cannot change a soul, but God does the increase, your duty is to spread and scatter the seed.

The preacher is the sower. Some easily welcome the seed of the gospel word, others harden their hearts, others are shallow and are pricked by worldly passions, which waylay them from the true path as they wallow in worries of this life. Other seed fell on good soil and bears much fruit. The word is the seed that the Holy Spirit uses to bring about a change of heart which is lasting and bears fruit of Godliness and depth.

The seed of the word can be snatched from the receptive heart by the evil one, symbolized by the seed that fell along the path. Some fell on hard rock lack depth and wither away quickly. Others fell among thorns and are pricked by worries of this world. The others fell on good soil and yielded 100, 60 and 30 fold. The missionary endeavour hinges on the seed that penetrates deep into the different soils in the global village.

We look to the One who says the labourers are few but harvest is plenty. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more labourers. The different contexts, call for cultural and contextual relevance in order to have inroads that are linking us to the reformation mandate of caring. This is a kingdom imperative. Which soil type fascinates you? Lord help me to receive your word by faith alone.

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Robert Munthali is my name ,a village Pastor in the Limpopo, Gooldville Mission ,married to Balekeni and blessed with two boys Tiwonge and Gomezga. I like reading and travelling. (Robert is also serving the General Assembly as Moderator.)

## **10. Kingdom Parable#2 -- Wheat and Tares**

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27 "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 28 " 'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 29 " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' " (Matthew 13:24-30 )

One of the strategic guidelines adopted by the UPCSA is as follows: The UPCSA will have mission oriented and holistically developed ministry. Ideally, people that are involved in mission and discipleship should be able to read, construe and interpret the signs of time. They should be conscious of the workings of God and detect the machinations of the enemy.

The servants of the owner of the field had been so well 'disciplined' (disciplined), trained and developed to identify and analyse the plants. They knew very well the seed that the owner had sowed and the plants that should germinate from that seed. They were very sure that the owner had sowed the correct seed. They vigilantly and diligently observed the germination. To their amazement, they noticed that there were plants that were not of the seed of their owner.

The owner, knowing the competitors, reckoned that it was someone with sinister motives that planted the weeds. The enemy wanted to frustrate the owner, as the wheat could not give the expected product when choked by the weeds. The enemy had come when everyone was asleep. People of God – wake up! In our slumber, the empire is at work, sowing seeds of blind subservience and loyalty, seeds of complacency, individualism, materialism, division, inequality, mistrust, pride, ignorance and arrogance, etc. We see hate and love, commendation and condemnation, growth and stagnation, cooperation and contradiction, efforts of unity and forces of division, etc., all thriving alongside each other. While we rest from the true worship of God, the enemy finds time to advance his machinations. People of God – wake up!

The owner assured his servants that his seed would grow and produce despite the attempts of the enemy. The owner believed in grace - that by and through grace, the wheat that is to be food for so many could not be choked by that which could not help anybody. At a right time, the weeds would be gathered and burned.

The UPCSA must be able to differentiate between the wheat and the weed. The church members must identify the forces that stifle their growth as individual Christians and as a reconciled community. That ability to identify is a step towards the right direction – liberation of the individual and liberation of the community from the snares of the empire. The grace of God is sufficient to help us realise our liberation without the permission of the enemy. Sola gratia. Shalom.

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Lungile Mpetsheni is the minister of word and sacrament, the General Secretary of the UPCSA and a proud family man. Thandiswa is my wife.

## **11. Kingdom Parable#3 -- Mustard and Yeast**

31 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."  
33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about [27 kilograms] of flour until it worked all through the dough." (Matthew 13:31-33)

Jesus must have been such an interesting person to have been around. Something was always happening when he was ministering during his lifetime on earth. If it wasn't some teaching that touched the hearts of ordinary people and enraged the spiritual elite then it was some healing by which a blind man received sight or lepers were healed or some miracle where the dead were raised. Aside from the teachings, healings and miracles, there were the parables that he told. These were simple stories about items and situations that people encountered every day that were used to reveal truths about the kingdom of God.

In these two parables today, Jesus does exactly this. The mustard seed is really tiny and, from that tiny seed, grows a substantial tree. Maybe Jesus was standing in the shade of just such a tree as he speaks. Perhaps as he walks into a nearby village he sees a woman making bread, possibly a baker baking bread for the whole village. For 27 kg of flour you would need about 2.7 kg of yeast, the ratio is about 1:100, about 1%.

In this world of bigger means better, Jesus' words come as something of a surprise. In the economy of the kingdom, smaller doesn't necessarily mean less effective. A tiny mustard seed grows into a great tree which in turn produces innumerable seeds which then grow into trees themselves. A tiny seed has an almost infinite number of trees inside it. A tiny bit of yeast works its way through the flour and causes the bread fill out and rise. Jesus tells these two parables in the context of a series of parables about the nature of the kingdom: the sower; the wheat and the weeds; the hidden treasure and the pearl and the net are all parables that occur in this chapter.

In a society that is becoming increasingly secularized, where faith doesn't seem to count for much anymore, where fewer and fewer people attend church and more and more people identify as atheists, we, as people of faith, wonder what the world is coming to. Our influence seems to be on the decline. To us Jesus says, "Do not worry. Although you might be small, you are not insignificant because, in the economy of the kingdom insignificant things can be amazingly effective; tiny things can have massive consequences. Take heart, people of the kingdom. Just because you're small doesn't mean that you don't count."

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

## **12. Kingdom Parable#4 -- Treasure and Pearls**

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:44-46)

In his book, *Signposts to Spirituality*, Trevor Hudson, tells the following story of his decision to enter the ministry:

"It was a nerve-wracking moment. I had resigned from secular employment and offered myself as a candidate for the ordained ministry. The first requirement involved passing an oral examination before the annual Synod. Examining me was a bishop well known for his direct and stern approach. His first question seemed simple enough.

'Tell me, Mr Hudson,' asked the bishop, 'what was the central message of Jesus?'

'Forgiveness of sin, sir!' I shot back immediately.

'No', responded the bishop, matter of factly.

'Peace on earth, sir', I tried again, remembering a line from the chorus of the angels that startled the sleepy shepherds in the middle of the night.

'No', said the bishop again, as my face began to redden.

By this time I thought it would be best for me to give up trying and I said so. Leaning over his desk the bishop caught my eye in his solid gaze and said, 'I want you to never, never forget that the main message of Jesus was, 'The kingdom of God is at hand.'

In Luke 4:43 Jesus says it plainly, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

And notice what we are told Jesus did after his resurrection -- "After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3,4)

It strikes me that if Jesus understood his mission to be about proclaiming the kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven, then surely, our mission as his disciples and citizens of God's kingdom is to do the same!

In fact, the good news about God's reign is so important and significant (life changing) that Jesus uses the above illustrations to drive his point home.

God's kingdom is found wherever God's reign of love and truth and compassion and justice is proclaimed -- in words and deeds.

As citizens of God's kingdom our purpose is to embody his values and goals (in community) and so proclaim his reign, to go out and share the love and grace and truth of Jesus with the world -- in other words, to establish, with him, his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

And when we 'get' this, i.e. that it is all about God's kingdom, God's reign, God's values, God's love, everything else fades into insignificance, or better stated, everything else is put into proper perspective. We first seek the kingdom of God, because the kingdom of God is the only true reality, through which all of life must be viewed and understood and lived.

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Chris Judelsohn is minister at Midrand Presbyterian Church, married to Keryn with 3 children -- Rachael, Emma and Nathan. He also serves as Convener of the UPCSA's Mission and Discipleship committee.

### **13. Kingdom Parable#5 -- The Net**

"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:47-51)

Jesus' parable of the Net is perhaps the most poignant and disturbing of all. It was told to the twelve apart from the crowd. This alone should give us pause lest we fall prey to what John Stott describes as evangelical Schadenfreude, delight in the misfortune of others. Jesus speaks of separating "the wicked from the righteous", of "a blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The language might be metaphorical but it is no less real. Lest we dismiss them in our PC world as 'theological hate speech' we do well to remember that they are the words of a loving Saviour.

Granted the gospel is not a message about hell. However, the gospel cannot be understood apart from its reality. Hell is real. It is vividly described in the New Testament. Granted it was originally "prepared for the devil and his angels". (Matt 25:41) However, it is shared by people. Sinclair Ferguson reminds us, 'if we need to be convinced of the reality of hell all we need to do is to consider the cross. It is all there... darkness, pain, isolation, sin bearing, divine judgement, curse, alienation, utter darkness, separation from God'.

The more profoundly we are aware of this, the more rigorous we will be with ourselves and the more tender toward the lost. Around 1843, the physically frail and soon to die aged 29, Robert Murray McCheyne wrote, 'As I was walking in the fields, the thought came over me with almost overwhelming power, that every one of my flock must soon be in heaven or hell. Oh how I wished that I had a tongue like thunder, that I might make all hear; or that I had the frame like iron, that I might visit every one, and say "Escape for thy life!" ' On another occasion, when he met his dearest friend Andrew Bonar, McCheyne asked what Bonar had preached on Sunday prior. On receiving the answer 'Hell', he asked: 'Did you preach it with tears?'

Once more the words of Jesus should give us pause, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me' ". (Matt 7:21-23)

May the gospel of our great salvation, rather than hell, have the last word: "...whoever believes in him [Jesus] shall not perish but have eternal life". (John 3:16)

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Alan Cameron. Minister at Trinity, Lynnwood. Married to Cecile. Blessed with three young adult children: Ross, Jess and Caitlin.

## **14. Kingdom Parable#6 -- Treasures new and old**

He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." (Matthew 13:52)

This is the last of the parables of the Kingdom that we will be looking at for the Month of Mission, and it is beautiful!

### ***Martin Luther's story embodies this parable beautifully...***

He was a teacher of the law but deeply and hopelessly aware of his failures and sinfulness. He served a church that was the custodian of a beautiful treasure - the gospel - but had locked it behind the walls of church tradition, indulgences, politics and legalism.

Luther discovered the truth of the Kingdom of God:

He rediscovered old treasures (some of them so long forgotten that they were like new):

- Salvation by grace. (Sola Gratia)
- A King who gave His life for us. (Solus Christus)
- Justification by faith. (Sola Fide)
- The Word of God. (Sola Scriptura)
- The sovereignty and glory of God. (Soli Deo Gloria)

When the Spirit-empowered dynamic of the Kingdom drops the scales off our eyes and we (re)discover Christ's love in our lives, it brings the beautiful treasures out of the storeroom.

- The Bible becomes exciting to read.
- The celebration of Easter becomes a glorious celebration of Christ as King over all
- Faith becomes a journey of hope, trust and relationship
- Grace becomes a well-spring of gratitude
- Our lives have purpose in bringing glory to God.

The Kingdom opens our eyes to what God had in mind for us when He created us. The Kingdom has its roots in the promise of an offspring who would crush the serpent's head and its glorious fulfilment is the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and return of Christ. The law that was meant to bring life and reveal God, became a burden of legalism and guilt, but the Kingdom restores its glory

The Kingdom - *that God come near in Christ* - is the key that unlocks the glorious treasure of our faith. It blows the cobwebs off dusty religion and offers abundant life!

Soli Deo Gloria!

## ***15. Sola Fide. Only faith***

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel the righteousness of 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)

These verses, as part of Paul's introduction of the letter in Romans 1, explain Paul's boldness in proclaiming the gospel. He was "not ashamed of the gospel". And he boasted only in the gospel (Rom 15:7-19). The reason for Paul's bold confidence was the power of the gospel message itself. The gospel is "**the power of God unto salvation,**" for both the Jew and the Gentile, both the church member and the agnostic, for both the backslidden and the sanctified.

This is a truth which we profess, but which we may easily fail to practice: The message of the gospel is the means by which God's power is implemented to save us; to save the lost.

We must be careful to instead of faith in the saving power of the gospel, rather put our trust in our methods to preach it. To love the wine skins more than the wine!

To have faith in our marketing strategies can so easily replace our firm belief in the simple gospel message that has the power of salvation if it is received in faith. Believing in methods rather than in the Good News, has the risk of watering down and compromising the lesson of the reforming fathers that we are saved by grace, only through faith -- that is, faith in the undiluted Good News, as proclaimed in the Scriptures, that Jesus Christ alone is the way, truth and the life.

***If the gospel is itself mighty to save, if it is the power of God resulting in salvation, then we need but to proclaim it, in simplicity, in purity, and in dependence upon God, who will by his Word and Spirit save those who believe it. And save only those who believe it, by the grace of God.***

Paul explains his boldness to proclaim the gospel in terms of what it reveals about God. The gospel, Paul says, reveals "**the righteousness of God.**" The gospel displays that God is awesomely good. It reveals God's standards of holiness. It reveals God's divine love by the way in which he saves people through faith, by pouring out his wrath on the Lord Jesus, so that sin's penalty is paid.

The wine skins that carry the simple, powerful Gospel to all must be fitting to the understanding that it is the wine and not the wine skins that bring salvation.

This faith is a gift that does not earn us any merit. It is rather a gift of faith in the saving merit of the work of Jesus. If we add anything else to faith as a requirement for salvation, we delete the bold message that the Gospel of Christ really has the power to save.

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Andries Combrink, minister at Centurion West Presby, retires on 28 February 2018 after 40 years in ministry. He is the husband to Marthie and devoted grandfather to Hannaleen.

## **16. Examples of the Kingdom#1 -- Comfort for John**

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" 4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. 6 Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." (Matthew 11:2-6)

(For this week we move from parables of the Kingdom to examples of the Kingdom)

John is in prison and he hears what Jesus is doing and wants to know if Jesus is the One. If he is the Messiah. Just as John asked this question people today ask similar questions. People are still spiritual seekers and they are asking questions about life and faith. People want to know what the meaning of life is. They may not be asking the church these questions but they are asking.

The answer that Jesus gave to John is one that included real evidence. He pointed to real events. He told John about people who had been healed from many different ailments and even dead people who were raised to life. He also pointed to the Good News being proclaimed. He did not make promises that the people could not relate to but pointed to real works done in his name.

I have just returned from 10 days in India. I was invited to see a children's ministry to children living in remote villages who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. It was a great opportunity and blessing to see this ministry. In one village after we had finished the children's program an old lady who had heard everything came and asked us to pray for her. She had four children who did not look after her and there is no support for old people in India. She had heard the message and wanted to see if Jesus could help her. Being a Hindu she had 330 million gods to approach but was open to see what this Jesus who she had just heard about could do for her.

Jesus is still performing miracles in peoples lives today. He still heals the sick and brings hope. He is still the Good News that people need in the world today.

To some people we are the only bearer of the Good News that they will experience. Do we have a faith that is built on real experiences of Jesus Christ? Can we share with others the miracles that he has done in our lives? If not, shouldn't we trust him more to perform miracles in and through us?

Ask Jesus to send you people who can ask you questions about the one true living hope in your life.

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Brian Smith is husband to Lana and father to Caleb and Jayden, who loves to mountain bike and tinker and who serves the Hillcrest Presbyterian Church.

## **17. Examples of the Kingdom#2 -- The first congregation**

*Those who **accepted** his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts2:41-47 )*

When we go back to that day when three thousand people were baptized in the first congregation, we see that ACCEPTANCE of the gospel is key to growth of a church. Those who **accepted the gospel received 7 gifts from God.** 1) They were filled with awe as they experienced God's spirit upon them. 2) They were no longer isolated, but working together for God. 3). They were enabled to give to those in need without hesitation, 4)They met regularly to keep themselves growing and accountable. 5) fellowshipped and ate together regularly with sincere heart, 6) praised God and 7) enjoyed the blessing of all of God's people.

The key to growth and mission is thus to figure out ways for our society to participate in a process of acceptance. It is for us to take time to look into ways in which a skeptical, highly individualized society can participate **in the act of taking and receiving what is offered in the gospel.** How do we find favorable reception in a society that is somewhat disappointed in leadership and skeptical that Jesus is the answer to all their woes?

I am sure that the 1st generation Christians had equally as many dilemmas about accepting Christ's message as we do today. The difference is that the early church were hungry and when they were fed, they understood and accepted, but today we have a generation of people who **satisfy their hunger by either living in a virtual world or by satisfying themselves with material things to feed their emptiness.** Control of self has become all important. Little time or energy is given to what others, let alone Jesus thinks. What if we begun to show how to have more than a narrow self-controlled world and embrace a broader and more encompassing Godly world?

What would happen if we LISTENED to why people are rejecting or ignoring the message of Christ? And why there is such a need for self-control today? And what would happen if we comforted those who are itching and hungry more seriously and spoke of the way in which God's is far greater than the present trend of self-control?

We also have to ask ourselves : Are we willing to listen to the rejecters, or are we simply happy to stay in our own happy environment and only preach to the converted? Are we willing to sacrifice more time for those who are in need, that they indeed are comforted and wish to take on the power and gifting that acceptance brings. And for those who are presently receiving the gifting that comes with acceptance of Christ, let us delight and enjoy it forever and of course share the enjoyment with all whom God puts before us.

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Pat Baxter, Ministry Secretary, Seeking to Serve You as best I can

## **18. Examples of the Kingdom#3 -- Preaching, Healing and Power**

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 Jesus is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." 13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. 14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. (Acts4:8-14)

Is it not interesting to note that of all God's attributes power awakens man's desire? Power appeals to man like water to the thirsty, or food to the hungry or clothing to the naked. The craving for power pervaded throughout all generations. This is all about wanting to control and satisfy personal and corporate desires. This love for power is determined by its motive. It is the kind of power that can possess its administrator. The temple authority questioned John and Peter **"By what power or what name did you do this?"** The temple authorities were not interested on the restorative justice of God; **'an act of kindness shown to a disabled person.'** They seemed to have no problem watching the man lying at the temple gate asking for alms. Power for personal and corporate control blinded them. They could not observe the brokenness of the man.

Peter introduced to the temple authorities a different kind of power; the power of God through Jesus the Christ. This kind of power does not control people's life but gives freedom and restoration of wholeness. This kind of power rebuilds that which was destroyed. This kind of power does not make sense to carnal mind. The temple authorities **were astonished by the courage of Peter and John; ordinary and unschooled men.** Theirs was not the power of logic or eloquence but the spiritual power. Their power was in their words and actions. There was power in what they proclaimed.

Power was in their message. Their message was about Christ the Saviour. The Christ who restores brokenness. When they proclaimed the name of Jesus evil was forced to submit. This is the power of the Holy Spirit that energizes those who are the carriers of the gospel of Christ. This power enables the ordinary ones. Paul said in Phil. 4:13; **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."** Clerk's Commentary puts this way; **"I can do all things - It was not a habit which he had acquired by frequent exercise, it was a disposition which he had by grace; and he was enabled to do all by the power of an indwelling Christ."** The divine power does not lose its effectiveness, it is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The Church is a community of the blessed ones of God. We are called to bless not to destroy. We refuse to support the domination of the world by force that causes so much brokenness and suffering through wars, displacement and poverty. Like Peter and John, the Church should continue to make the Empire uncomfortable. The Church's message should critique the love of power. Like Peter and John, the Church's message is; **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"** Acts 4:12.

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Rev Mukondi Ramulondi is a minister at Mt Horeb Presbyterian Church in Polokwane. His best friend is Konanani and their friendship gave birth to a marriage some 28 years ago and are blessed with 1 son Dzilafho and 2 daughters Vhushavhelo and Ngelekanyo and one granddaughter Mulweli.

## **19. Examples of the Kingdom#4 -- Crossing boundaries in Antioch**

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. 22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11:19-26)

This is an example of a missional church. From a small group of persecuted refugees, the church in Antioch saw large numbers of people come to Christ. But the reason this church experienced such growth was not that the leaders employed the latest church growth principles but because "The hand of the Lord was with them." This was a church that God was blessing.

A key lesson we learn is that *God blesses a church where every member is a minister.*

The founding and prospering of the church at Antioch was arguably one of the most significant events in history. It led to the distinctiveness of the Christian church, in that it blended together in one body both Jews and Gentiles. It was here that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians and mission outreaches to Asia Minor and Greece were launched from here. You and I conceivably would not be Christians today had it not been for God's blessing on this church.

This church was not founded by apostles or ministers or trained missionaries but by unnamed men who were scattered because of persecution and came to Antioch speaking, not just to the Jews, but to the Greeks (Gentiles). The Greek word for "speak" is the word for normal conversation. These men did not preach as orators in the marketplace. Rather, in their everyday contacts, they told others about Jesus Christ. There is reason to believe that Luke was a native of Antioch. Perhaps as a doctor, he was treating a man who told him about Jesus Christ, leading to his conversion.

These men remain unnamed for a reason. If they had been named, we would hold them up as missionary heroes. We would think that what they did was something that we could never do. But their remaining unnamed tells us that they were common men who had met the Lord Jesus and who wanted others to know Him, too. We all can do what they did.

Even when Barnabas and Saul rose to positions of leadership through their teaching ministry, this church did not depend on them in order to function. They sent them off on a relief mission to Jerusalem and on missionary journeys and kept operating. This was because this church knew the principle of the body, that God has gifted every member and each one is expected to exercise his or her gift in ministry.

If the spreading of the gospel or the functioning of the church depends on the labours of full-time workers, ministry will be severely limited. But if every person who has trusted in Christ alone as Saviour and Lord feels the obligation of serving Him and of telling others the good news about Him, the gospel will spread and the church will be built up.

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The Revd. Armando Sontange is married to Shumikazi. Armando has a blessed calling indeed:

- Shumikazi calls him Honey
- Kwezi, Litha and Khanyo call him Dad
- Mithali and Oyama call him Grand Dad
- The folks at Kagiso Presbyterian Church call him their Moruti and preacher
- And God calls him His.

*Not bad Huh??*

## **20. Examples of the Kingdom#5 -- An earthquake and a lifequake**

The jailer called out for some lights. He rushed in, shaking with fear. He fell down in front of Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out. He asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus. Then you and your family will be saved." 32 They spoke the word of the Lord to him. They also spoke to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night, the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds. Right away he and his whole family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house. He set a meal in front of them. He and his whole family were filled with joy. They had become believers in God. (Acts 16:29-34)

Martin Luther was at a crossroads in his faith -- he thought studying further would help him find the answers to how his sins could be forgiven, how he could be assuaged of the constant guilt he felt, how he could find the righteousness of God offered through the Bible, but not the same righteousness offered by the Church -- he was looking for new wine in an old wineskin!

Paul and Silas are at a similar juncture in their mission. They are facing a terrible trial - after casting an evil spirit out of a slave girl, Paul and Silas were beaten, thrown in jail, put under close guard, and placed in the inner cell with their feet bound in stocks. But they don't question God -- is this what God's kingdom looks like? Do some good and get thrown in jail? No, they are still on the mission of spreading the word of God -- this is what God's kingdom looks like, pouring new wine into the wineskins of people's lives. Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns. They knew that God had sent them to bear witness for their faith. They didn't know an earthquake was about to set them free (vv. 26-28). Nor did they know that soon they would lead the Philippian jailer and his whole family to the Lord (vv. 29-34). As far as they knew, they'd be in prison a while. Just because they were "suffering for the kingdom" didn't mean that their mission had come to an end.

As we look at this, yes, we may go through some crisis of faith that may cause us to question our own mission, cause us to even question if this is what God's Kingdom looks like. We may even need an earthquake to shake things up and, like Luther, begin to reform not only ourselves, but also the community in which we have been placed.

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Ruth is husband to Warren, mother to Lia (11), Sarah (9) and Noah (7), minister at St Andrews Germiston and would be lost without her crochet hook and wool!

## **21. Examples of the Kingdom#6 -- A transformed community**

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1Thessalonians 1:2-10)

The theory of this particular letter is that it was the first letter Paul wrote to any of the early churches. Theory, of course, because we can't know for sure. Which would make it one of the earliest writings, because as we know the gospels were only written much later, after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Upon reading this first chapter I thought to myself what complimentary words Paul uses for this church at Thessalonica. Wouldn't it be an amazing thing to receive such a commendation from a Christian that the church views with such high regard. Imagine receiving this letter in your local session; complimenting you on your faith, good deeds, love, endurance, and how you were known throughout your region for your witness.

The other thing that struck me was Paul speaks about how the community of Thessalonica received the message "for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with joy". Despite the people living in suffering they were able to not only hear the good news, but be transformed it.

The primary goal of God's Kingdom is to bring transformation, there should be no way you can encounter the gospel message and be able to remain the same. But, transformation is not a one time event, it must be dynamic and constant. Perhaps the message of the gospel in the reformer Martin Luther's time had become stagnant and inward looking?

As part of the reformed tradition, we are committed to continuous transformation. Are we still dynamic or have we become stuck in our ways? Does the 'church' need another Reformation?

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Melanie Cook, wife to Gordon, mother to Joshua and Rebecca, and minister of St Giles Presbyterian, Norwood. In the business of moving the church...sometimes spiritually, sometimes physically.

## **22. With Cleopas & Luther on the Emmaus Road: Sola Scriptura**

Then Jesus said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:25-32)

500 years ago on the 31 October, 1517, a young German monk strode up to the church door in the town of Wittenberg with a piece of paper in one hand and a hammer and a few nails in the other. On the paper were written 95 theological points. He nailed the paper to the door. The rest is history.

That seemingly insignificant event, say historians, was the start of what came to be known as 'The Protestant Reformation', one of the most important intellectual and spiritual movements in Western civilisation.

The monk was Martin Luther and his actions marked the climax of a long personal struggle during which he journeyed, Emmaus-like, from disillusionment to faith, from deep disappointment with his church to a joyful faith in Christ through a rediscovery of the Good News of Jesus.

For a disillusioned priest like Luther, for whom the church had become an obstacle rather than the nurturer of faith, it was the opening of the Scriptures that unlocked the joy of faith in Christ. It is hardly surprising therefore that the words *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) came to be one of the important mantras of the Reformation.

Martin Luther's personal circumstances were much different from Cleopas and his friend that resurrection morning when they set out from Jerusalem to Emmaus, their hearts heavy with disillusionment. But both stories involve men grappling with intense disappointment. The Jesus dream had come to naught. The vision had gone. The glory had departed.

Then Jesus drew near. He walked with them. He listened to them. And only then did he speak. He opened the scriptures and slowly they were brought under its magnetic spell and their hearts began to burn within them.

That is scripture at work! Not 'throwing the Book' but 'opening' the Book and allowing its message of hope and wisdom to change peoples' hearts and their way of seeing. Doubtless Cleopas and his friend had read the passages before, the difference on the Emmaus Road was that it was Jesus who 'opened' the scriptures.

*Sola scriptura* without the quickening Spirit of Christ is dead. It suffocates.

*Sola scriptura* that quickens the heart and kindles the flame of faith is scripture that points to Jesus and is full of him. It is scripture alive. It is scripture that shapes our thinking. It is scripture that heals and binds people together.

So let's get back to the Bible as the benchmark of our lives, but let's do so, not with hard pharisaical hearts, but with the humble and listening heart of Jesus.

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James Gray is the minister of the Hermanus United Church. He is married to Fiona and is of the belief that a day away from Hermanus is a wasted day.

## **23. A Kingdom Prayer -- Our Father.**

**Our Father** in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)

In various religions it is customary to collect the names of the deity e.g. the "ninety-nine beautiful names" in Islam. Jesus' name for God here and throughout the Gospel accounts is strikingly simple and uncomplicated: "Father." Jesus spoke very intimately of "My Father" or absolutely of "The Father" or of "Your Father" to the disciples. Jesus tells Mary Magdalene to "go, tell the disciples that I am ascending to *your* God and to *my* God, to *your* Father and to *my* Father". But in *this* prayer, he speaks of "**our** Father."

This is what the church confesses in its Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only (*unicum*) Son, our Lord." Jesus' relation to the Father is absolutely unique. He, and he alone, God's Son by nature; Christians are God's children by the grace of adoption, and all people are God's "children" in a certain sense, by creation. Jesus alone, is God's Son by right and he shares this status with us that we can call God *our* Father too and especially in prayer.

In the OT at Yahweh is not introduced (Ex.20:2; Dt.5:6) to Israel *coldly* as Yahweh the God but *warmly* as Yahweh your God. In a similar manner Jesus introduced God to the disciples at the Sermon on the Mount not coldly but with a tone of affection as our Father. Although he uses the Greek word "patêr" here, in his own prayers he often used the Aramaic word "abba" which is an intimate term for fathers used by children both young and old. Abba is a word for affection and love.

At the same time, the word "father" carries connotations of authority. The Father is the one responsible for the child: he is the child's progenitor and so its guardian, provider, and Head. The word, has elements of strength in it beyond its obvious tenderness.

The word "our" is significant because it turns even individual prayer into prayer for others. The Lord's prayer, right from its beginning, is an intercessory prayer. The "our" teaches us that when we address God as our Father we address Him on behalf of all the rest of us, too. Jesus having made prayer private with his store room (v6), now makes prayer public with his "our." Barclay says "it is very significant that in the Lord's prayer the words, I, me, and mine never occur."

The "our Father" in the Lord's prayer will help in fighting classism. The Lord's prayer plants a democratizing time bomb in culture; it is both leveller and elevator. Approach the throne of God with this understanding that we belong to God and He is our Father who cares about our yesterday today and our tomorrow's needs and situations.

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Christopher Mkandawire is husband to Rhoda, Father to Wanagwa (19), Kondwani (19) and Wongani (11), minister at David Livingstone Memorial Presbyterian Church in Livingstone Zambia and enjoys serving the Lord in the UPCSA.

## **24. A Kingdom Prayer -- Who art in Heaven - Hallowed**

Our Father in heaven,  
**hallowed be your name,**  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)

In thinking of prayer as an African woman, what comes to mind is "weeping" or "crying". I have never seen or heard an African woman praying without shedding a tear. I am thinking of the triple jeopardy of my own mother, grandmother and many women that I have ministered to and many prayer services that I have conducted for and with women, which always ended up in tears. I approach this passage with the question "**What makes an African woman cry when she prays?**" I problematise this cry, as a cry for life, liberation, land, economics, patriarchy, aesthetics, ethics, creation etc.

In the first verse of this chapter, Jesus cautions us not to be like hypocrites, who when they pray, stand in synagogues and street corners for the world to see but rather we ought to pray in secret. What Jesus seems to suggest is that firstly prayer is **an inward-looking process**. In prayer, we need to come back to ourselves and reflect on our experiences as we then approach God, who then teaches us how to pray. We approach God as human beings with concrete life experiences. Prayer in that sense becomes a lived experience and journey. In addition, the prayer that Jesus thought us affirms this. "**11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.**"

If this is our thesis then, **what makes an African woman cry when she prays** becomes exactly that, **an inward-looking process**. Her tears are a reflection of her concrete life experiences. The following insights from **1 Samuel 1** elucidate this point:

"In her deep anguish Hannah **prayed** to the Lord, **weeping** bitterly". (10) "Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard". (13) When Eli mistook her for a drunk woman "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; **I was pouring out my soul to the Lord.**" (15)

What this implies then for the church, is that mission should be an **inward-looking process**. In being a missional church, we begin by looking at concrete life experiences. We listen to the cries of those who in deep anguish weep when they pray, i.e. the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts and the marginalised. Whenever we fail to listen and to respond to the cry for life, we contradict the message of Jesus who in John 10:10 says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

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## **25. A Kingdom Prayer -- Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will on earth as heaven**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
**your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.**  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)

In this passage we see Jesus introducing a new concept about relationship between God and the faith community. We are God's Children and he is our Father. In Galatians 3:26 Paul says "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" and in 2 Corinthians 6:18, Paul says 'And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty'. As children of God our spiritual DNA shows that we are his offspring. In John 1:12 Jesus said, 'But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God', through faith we are God's children and Christ is our brother and friend.

We need to treat God with great respect (Hallowed be your name). In Exodus 20:7, the Bible says 'You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. The American Heritage Dictionary defines hallowed as, "sanctified; consecrated; highly venerated; sacrosanct." To hallow is "to make or set apart as holy. To respect or honour greatly; revere." In simpler terms, we often use hallowed to refer to someone whom we should treat with awe and respect because he or she deserves it.

God's kingdom has to do with His ways and order. According to John Calvin the Kingdom refers to the presence of God's rule on earth. So here we are asking that God's ways and order happens here, as they are fully obeyed in Heaven. This kingdom is spiritual which occurs in peoples' hearts, as well as eschatological which will come with outward glory and be fully consummated at some future date.

His reign in us has practical dimensions and so we have the great privilege place our needs before him and, through faith, we receive them (as we ask for daily bread). We also pray what St Augustine called the "terrible petition" because he realized that if we pray "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" with an unforgiving heart, we are actually asking God not to forgive us. We also ask for God's protection preventing us from the affection and effects of sin. This amazing prayer is about *God's glory and His coming Kingdom*. It is about allowing His reign to become reality in us and it invites us to ask for His help (daily bread, forgiveness and protection).

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Talkmore Chilanga, husband to Rumbidzai, a father of four daughters (Esher, Megan and twins- Aliyah and Alyson). I am a minister in the UPCSA, serving at Mabvuku Congregation in Harare Zimbabwe

## **26. A Kingdom Prayer -- Give us our daily bread**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us today our daily bread.**

Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)

The Kingdom of God is like a baker whose job it is to bake and supply bread daily for his community...

The baker bakes just enough bread for each day because any excess will be stale and will not be good or enjoyable. Secondly, the baker faithfully supplies the bread without fail because he knows that the whole community depends on that bread. Thirdly, the baker chooses the best ingredients so that the bread provides the nutritional needs of the people.

The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of faith, faith in God alone to supply us our daily portion. God is the ultimate supplier of our bread, our needs as individuals and as a church. Yet many times we prefer to be supplied from the bakeries of the world and to end up having too much cake in our possession, only to find that when they are not God given or God directed, the cakes cause us unwellness. Or we hoard bread in the form of possessions, positions, programs, people and their promises, because we fail to operate "by faith alone." We end up seeking salvation for our sorry situations in these excesses, yet we teach our children that any food taken in excess will give you a tummy ache.

The Kingdom of God is like the church which goes about its daily mission in the faith that God supplies what they need in the right portions and at the right time. The church that is not greedy for fast food success, or pop-star popularity, or politics style control.

It is a church whose modus operandi is one of a faith-based peace of mind, faith-based drivenness and a faith-based dependence on God. That is what Jesus meant by, "Give us today our daily bread." It is a humble yet confident request for security, God given security. Based on "faith alone."

Lydia Neshangwe, minister at St Andrew's Presbyterian in Bulawayo, married to Paul and mum to two boys, and seeker of wholeness for all.

## **27. A Kingdom Prayer -- Forgive us as we forgive**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)

We often refer to verses 9-13 as the Lord's Prayer but it could be more accurate to title it "The Disciples' Prayer". Jesus does not give us this prayer for memory or repetition. It is not intended to serve as a substitution but as a pattern as to *how* we should pray. The purpose of prayer is to glorify God's name, and to ask for help to accomplish God's will on earth. Thus this prayer begins with God's interest, not ours: God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will. Prayer brings us into the mind, heart and will of God. It helps us to see things the way God sees it rather than the way we often want or desire it to be. A Kingdom prayer is therefore a prayer established and set in God's will.

It may be a dangerous thing to pray and act in God's will. 500 years ago Martin Luther dared to pray and respond to God's calling to revive and reform the Church. It led to the formulation of his *95 Theses* which challenged the Roman Church, leading to his excommunication and the start of the Protestant movement, even though he had no intention of breaking away from the church. For the reformers the unity of the church was always central and essential. It still is! To be reformed is to be ecumenical.

One of the serious issues Luther raised with the church of his day related to the *Sale of Indulgences* which advocated that people could 'buy' their salvation and 'earn' forgiveness. Luther was clear that salvation is in Christ alone. We are saved *by grace, through faith*. In verse 12 we pray "*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*". This is not intended to suggest that believers earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others; this would be contrary to God's free grace and mercy. Put simply, it means that we are able to forgive others because we know what it means to be forgiven by God. If we have truly *experienced* God's forgiveness, then we will have a readiness to forgive others.

In the midst of brokenness, pain, suffering, sin and struggle, the world is in dire need of a message of love and forgiveness. It is not in *earning* but in *yearning* for the love and forgiveness of Christ that we receive hope, peace, joy and the gift of (eternal) life. Herein is our mission responsibility of proclaiming Christ to the world. Kingdom people hear, receive, live and share the kingdom message as we pray "Your Kingdom come". Are you?

Kingdom people know what it means to forgive because we have been forgiven. Are you a kingdom person?

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Jerry Pillay is teaching Church History at the University of Pretoria. Only by grace he is blessed to be married to Sandra and through faith and good works have raised 3 adorable children: Jessie, Janice and Aaron.

## **28. A Kingdom Prayer: Lead us Not into Temptation but Deliver us.**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

**And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.** (Matthew 6:9-13)

A right view of God leads to a right view of ourselves and a right view of the world. From the moment Jesus Christ set foot upon the earth, the Kingdom of God burst forth into the world and with it a new wave of worship, understanding God's word, and a new way of relating to God.

As we come to the last lines of the Lord's Prayer, we should remember that the first part of the prayer pointed us to God, our eyes are lifted heavenward, and we are reminded what a right view of God looks like. The second part shows us how the right view of God enables us to both relate to the world and to resist the evil one. This is the essence of the last lines of the Lord's Prayer.

We are to ask for God's protection "**and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.**" God would never tempt the believer, because it is not His nature to tempt us, though He may at times test us to refine our faith. The last lines of the Lord's Prayer are to do with protection from the devil, the Prince of lies. When he comes to tempt us, like he tempted Jesus, we will be given the strength both to endure and to escape his schemes. As believers, we must pray to be led out of temptation, delivered from evil, so that we might not fall short and sin. Through Christ we will be led onto the paths of righteousness.

The Reformers understood that a right view and a right relationship with God would help them to resist the world the flesh and the devil. Today we are still confronted by all sorts of evil and schemes from the Devil. There are temptations by our pride, lust, greed and self-reliance. There are evils of social injustice, corruption, and hate all about us. The Lord's Prayer reminds that when things seem darkest, we can look to heaven, receive strength from our heavenly Father to resist evil and join him in His rescue mission to the world. The reformer, Martin Luther said that when one feels down and overwhelmed, *to "say the Lord's Prayer, and tearfully tell God what you need. ... God wants us to pray, and he wants to hear our prayers---not because we are worthy, but because he is merciful."* And as the Risen Jesus reminds us, believers triumph over the evil one "**by the blood of the lamb by the word of their testimony**" Rev 12:11a.

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Douglas Bower is the minister at St. Columba's Church in Hatfield, Pretoria. He enjoys mountain biking, walking the dogs, spending time with his wife Caitlin, and playing with his baby son Joshua.

## 29. *Soli Deo Gloria*

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!  
34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"  
35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"  
36 For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

For the past 4 Sundays we have looked at 4 of the 5 keys to Martin Luther's Reformation teaching:

- 1) Sola Gratia (Salvation by Grace)
- 2) Solus Christus (Salvation through Christ alone)
- 3) Sola Fide (Justification by Faith)
- 4) Sola Scriptura (Only through the Word in Scripture)

And now today

- 5) Soli Deo Gloria (Only to God be Glory)

Our text is that glorious doxology in Romans 11:

The Old Testament is filled with the GLORY of God. The word for glory in Hebrew literally means "Heavy". The New Testament, too, is saturated with the GLORY of God.

Over the years I have become increasingly amazed at the way John, in both his Gospel and First Letter again and again speaks of the GLORY of God interchanged with the GLORY of Jesus Christ, His Son.

This GLORY in all its wonder, height and depth is shown most triumphantly – most gloriously and most surprisingly, in the SACRIFICE of Jesus on the Cross – the ultimate act of Sacrificial LOVE is the ultimate GLORY of Christ and, therefore, also of the Father.

*John 3:16* God so loved the World that He GAVE His only begotten Son ..."

Because of the Love and Obedience of the Son to the Father and their combined LOVE for the World, they are glorified and Jesus prays that as He has been glorified, this GLORY may be passed on to His followers (Disciples) – those present at that time and all who come after them. He prays and urges His followers to pass on this ultimate GLORY of God by loving one another as He has loved them, and that no greater Love has anyone than that he/she lays down their life for their friends.

Indeed as Paul's Doxology in Romans 11 proclaims:

"O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable His judgments"

When I was a young man I read a book by JB Phillips entitled *Your God is too small*.

Again and again we need to realise how GREAT God is - beyond our finite understanding. This is the God who loves each one of us, enough to suffer and die for us on the cruellest Roman gallows, and who asks us not only to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength but to LOVE ONE ANOTHER as He loves us.

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Glen Craig is a retired Minister with an Ecumenical heart, still happily ministering virtually full-time. He is married to Jeanette and they live at Kenton-on-Sea in the Eastern Cape.

### **30. A different Kingdom...**

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by people. (Romans 14:17-18)

Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome to convince them to support him on his proposed missionary endeavour to Spain. His letter was not his CV, but his manifesto - a picture of the gospel he preached.

This was the gospel of which he was "not ashamed" because it was the "power of God for salvation" (1:16). He has excited because "a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known" (3:21), because "at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (5:6) and "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (5:8). He could triumphantly proclaim "you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of heir-ship."

This gospel, this Kingdom, is not like earthly kingdoms...

Earthly Kingdoms are about power, wealth and greed. When it comes to earthly kingdoms, Darwin's survival of the fittest becomes the survival of the fattest! In earthly kingdoms greed, self-enrichment, abuse of power and self-aggrandisement are the order of the day.

But if God's kingdom is not about power, wealth, appetite or greed, then what is it about?

- It is about lives changed by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.
  - Jesus' **righteousness** imputed on us.
  - **Peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ
  - **Joy** - because our names are in the Book of life
- It's about **servicing** Christ and not ourselves or anyone else. It's not *our* church or *our* denomination. It is about Him!
- It's about doing things God's way (**pleasing** Him), and, in so doing, impacting our communities (being **approved** by people). (Think of the Church in Acts 2 "praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people").

A *missional church* is a kingdom community and this is what you and I are called to...

### **31. Greatness in the Kingdom**

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"<sup>2</sup> He called a little child and had him stand among them. <sup>3</sup> And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:1-4)

I've been asked to write a daily devotion on this passage but to stick to certain guidelines such as "What does the passage say about the church being missional?", "What Reformation for our own souls is suggested (or demanded) by this passage?"

I think these are nice questions but I don't want to answer them so directly because I think the passage is more about Jesus wanting us to have a spontaneous and uncomplicated relationship with him.

A relationship that doesn't consist of obligations, of ticking the boxes, of doing this or that to please him. He got up the nose of the Pharisees precisely because of this kind of interaction over the kingdom of God or, in this instance, who was the greatest in the kingdom. In a legalistic world, especially of Judaic Pharisaism being able to tick boxes was a sign of holiness, while your heart could be stone cold hard and dead.

Against that horrible image, of a life of obedience but with no love for the one you are claiming to obey; Jesus puts a child in the middle of the group and says, be like this one: children who wear their heart on their sleeve, who cannot hide when they feel love and when they give love and are happy to show their spontaneous joy to those around them, and their innate fear of things that will harm them.

So I'd like to leave you with a few other questions about being like a child with God: when last did you do something quite spontaneous, and for no other reason than the love of God had made you do it? When did you give and not count the cost in some action? When last did you cry before God or with God about some of the horrible things in the world, the evil that makes us unsafe? How often do you express spontaneous and abundant joy in worship, like a child would innocently dance at the sound of music, not being too conscious of what others may think?

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Rod Botsis is the minister at Belville Presby, husband to Mandy and dad to Hannah and Rachel.  
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This brings us to the end of the Month of Mission Devotions.  
We hope that they have been a blessing to you.