

Pastor's Word

Foreword by Rev Martin Yee:

Pastor Samuel preached a sermon on 12 Feb 2006 regarding Jesus healing the leper, based on Mark 1:40-45. In the sermon, there are major theological points that are almost “definitive” in the Lutheran Church’s understanding of sickness and healing, which in turn are derived from the theology of the cross. It will be good for us to take note of them. This is because much of our current contemporary views amongst Christians in Singapore are based on the theology of glory instead. As a Church we need to have a common theological understanding of sickness and healing; otherwise, we cannot be united and effective together, as our theological understanding informs our actions and words.

Synopsis of Sermon by **Pastor Samuel Wang** at JCC, 12th February 2006.

Jesus Heals the Leper Who is ALL OF US

Mark 1:40-45 (NIV) – 40A man with leprosy^{} came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." 41Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. 43Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44"See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." 45Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.*

**The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin — not necessarily leprosy.*

THE LEPER AND HIS LORD

v. 40: A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

Notice that THIS LEPER'S FAITH MADE HIM EAGER TO BE HEALED.

Some Christians do not think they can ever be healed from their spiritual leprosy. They think there is no hope, so they plunge deeper into their sins. Eg: "If I steal office stationary and get punished, I might as well go all the way and rob a bank." But in the Apostle's Creed, the confession "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" reminds us that there is hope yet. When we repent and depend on Jesus, our hearts will be transformed.

Some Christians are indifferent to sin – do not mourn for their sin, do not wish to forsake it, and do not wish to be rid of it and be cleansed. The Gospel, which is Good News, is Old News to them. It is not interesting to them, and does not move them at all. They hide among God's people like saints but in fact are not repentant and are full of pride. They do not even realise their sin and think the world of themselves. Ears are always pricked out to find fault with the preacher instead of concentrating on the preaching of the Gospel.

Some Christians are indifferent to spiritual things – lazy towards the Word of God and praying. The leper was not like that. He desired to be healed, gave all the world to be healed, to be rid of his skin disease. He pined so much to be healed.

How I wish all brothers and sisters would desire so much to be rid of their sins, to come to God beating their breasts and saying, "Lord I am a sinner and is not worthy to be your son or daughter."

Christians who love their sins do not desire to be rid of their sins but instead want to hug their sins all the more. They want to be saved from hell but not from sin. Their idea of salvation is not to be saved from the love of evil, but that is God's idea of salvation. How can they hope to be slaves of sin and at the same time be free? Sin is more fearful than leprosy or any other sickness. How I wish people would be more urgent about their sin and want to get rid of it, just as they are urgent about getting rid of any physical ailment that affects them.

v. 41-42: Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

Secondly, note that the leper had DEFERENCE TO JESUS' MERCY. "If you are willing..." The leper tells Jesus that he hesitates because he knows Jesus is Lord and Saviour. Jesus alone decides whom he wants to have mercy upon, and he decides if he will have mercy on the leper. HOW MANY OF US OFTEN THOUGHT PRESUMPTUOUSLY THAT GOD MUST ALWAYS FORGIVE US NO MATTER WHAT?

The leper is begging, beseeching Jesus on his knees. His attitude is different from those whom I heard praying loudly declaring God's healing to be complete, thinking the louder they make their pronouncement the more it will come true. No amount of

pronouncement by a human being alone can do any good. UNLESS GOD WILLS IT, IT IS NOT DONE! The leper worships Jesus and begs his mercy.

WE HAVE TO CAST OURSELVES ON THE MERCY AND GRACE OF GOD ALMIGHTY FOR HEALING OF OUR BODIES OR OUR SOULS. If God so much as to say no, then we deserve that, for our bodies are due for destruction, and death is the result of our sin from Adam. Our souls too deserve condemnation for our thoughts and actions from day to day prove to the world and ourselves that we are truly sinners.

When we visit a sick person, we need not pray presumptuously that God will indeed heal this person. Praying with supplication for this person, we beg God's mercy on behalf of this person. Our prayer should be like this, *"Oh God, please have mercy upon _____, look upon their suffering with compassion. As you have shown yourself compassionate towards the leper who came to you begging on his knees so we beg you too on our knees that you will heal _____ from their sickness. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the great physician. Amen."*

But there are those who do not have faith to even ask for God's forgiveness. Having been a Christian for so many years, we are still bound by sin because we still have the Old Adam inside us. This Old Adam will only be done away with at the end of time or at our death. Now we are both saints and sinners at the same time. There are Christians who do not understand this and lament so much over their sins that their tears blind them. They no longer hear the leper saying: *"If you are willing, you can make me clean."* They only weep silently in despair.

Do the ministry of encouragement. Those with faith should go alongside those who don't and pray with them and encourage them to pray thus, "God forgive me a poor sinner, who have no merits at all, please have mercy and forgive me, and lift up my feeble hands and knees to serve you once again, Amen."

The ministry of absolution. Personal confession can be made directly to God or you can go to the pastor and he will listen to your confession and help you by pronouncing God's absolution to you and counsel you to trust God's loving kindness for you so that you can carry on trusting Jesus for the rest of your faith journey.

v. 41: Filled with compassion, ...

Thirdly, note that JESUS IS WILLING TO HEAL. The word 'compassion' is a translation of the Greek word *splagch/nizomai* meaning JESUS IS STRONGLY MOVED IN HIS BOWELS. Here it means the emotions are so moved that Jesus is going to burst out! If you understand Greek, it means that the person is so full of emotions that he cannot contain it any longer.

[Ed: The bowels were once thought to be the seat of love and pity. Hence, to be moved in the bowels implies a visceral emotional reaction.]

Some older translations use the word anger, suggesting that Jesus is filled with anger. If Jesus is angry, HE IS ANGRY AT UNFAITH, yet HE IS COMPASSIONATE TO HEAL (EFFECTS OF SIN). The leper's words "If you will" might have caused anger to Jesus who is so moved that he could have shouted with anger that this person does not know how much Jesus is touched with pain at his ordeal, "**What? If I will? Of course I will!**"

Jesus can heal without touching the leper. Those who touched a leper became unclean, they were ritually defiled and would be treated like the leper and must live outside the city apart from others until he could prove he was clean again, that he did not get infected. BUT "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man." Jesus did not fear that he would be infected and be unclean, his compassion made him reach out to touch someone who needed a touch very badly. He said, "I am willing. Be clean!"

We who are Christians having experienced the power of God's forgiveness in our lives can go to those whom nobody would touch, those whom society forgets and are kept behind closed doors and walls. Do you know who they are? These are the prisoners. Today many are seeing a revival in the prisons because there are pastors and lay people who have the strong emotions that Jesus had when they see the prisoners and they go to them and touch them with Jesus' healing touch of acceptance and love. **You can do it too!**

There are many who are lonely and sick lying in old folks' homes and some are shut-ins at home because of mobility problem. How many there are nobody knows, but the numbers are growing. If Jesus were to see them, he would have such a strong emotion that he would burst out, "I am willing." – Have you this feeling in your heart?

The church started a Dialect Ministry and when we ask for people who want to minister in dialect to mostly elderly people, we have a group of brothers and sisters who say "I am willing." Thank God for that. But we need more to say "I am willing" and go and visit them. We need more to move your butts out of the pews, not just to say "I am willing" sitting there.

v. 42: Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

Fourthly, note that JESUS HAS THE POWER TO HEAL. Was it anything that the leper did that cured him? Loud enough prayer? Strong enough faith? Appropriate posture of kneeling?

Have you heard of the saying, "You must have faith, you must believe, just believe, and you will be healed." Once again, we say that it is JESUS CHRIST ALONE who heals him. Not his belief, not his faith, certainly not faith in faith alone, but faith in JESUS."

You see, FAITH REQUIRES AN OBJECT, FAITH REQUIRES SOMETHING TO HAVE FAITH IN. The leper put his trust in Jesus, his object of faith was Jesus. So up to now we know that Jesus is willing and he is able to heal. He is so moved to heal that he touches this man.

Some people wonder why Jesus did not heal them when he healed the leper in the past? I have no answer. It might be better not to heal at that time than heal. It is not that Jesus is not compassionate, but in his divine wisdom God knows better than any of us. I so wish God would heal Hannah my third daughter so that she needs no longer have any more operations. To that effect I pray, but I am also glad God did not answer this prayer so quickly because sad to say, I actually think I treasure her more when I know how suddenly I may lose her at the operating table.

v. 43-44: Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

The fifth point to note here is that JESUS DID NOT WANT TO BE KNOWN AS A MIRACLE HEALER. WHY NOT?

1. HE DID NOT WANT THEM TO KNOW HE IS THE MESSIAH.

This is one of the many passages in Mark that led Wilhelm Wrede to propose the concept of the "Messianic Secret." Jesus did not want people to know he was the Messiah as long as he was on earth. He revealed himself only to his disciples, but even then his disciples did not understand his mission as Saviour of the World fully. Only when he died and then resurrected and with his teaching the disciples further after his resurrection before he went back to heaven did it finally dawn on the disciples what and who Jesus is.

2. THE SECRET IS KEPT TO PREVENT PEOPLE TO HAVE FALSE IDEA OF JESUS' PURPOSE AS MESSIAH: That he is a miracle healer, which would obscure them from seeing his real purpose later on.

JESUS' REAL PURPOSE IS TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM THEIR SINS (Matthew 1:20-21) "But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Whenever we are in a situation when we need physical healing, let us never forget that Jesus is able and willing to heal us both physically and spiritually. Ultimately all of us BODY and SOUL is to be healed and the resurrected BODY and SOUL will be made perfect by Christ himself on the Day of Judgement. We will no longer be Saint and Sinner at the same time, but fully a SAINT.

v. 45: “Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.”

The concluding point to note here is that THE LEPER CANNOT KEEP QUIET ABOUT WHAT JESUS HAD DONE! Can this man keep the healing to himself? NO WAY! He too is gripped by the fever of being healed. He cannot contain it. He is changed! He can go home now! He can touch people and be touched! He is so moved like Jesus that he burst out telling everyone freely about Jesus healing him.

When was the last time you gave a testimony to tell someone or a group of people of how God is so good to you? When was it that Jesus' forgiveness had touched you that you cannot but be so joyful to tell people about him? If only our lives are lived in repentance of our sins daily and we hear the Gospel daily and trust it, then we will have that joy which is so hard to keep suppressed inside of us that we have to let it all out.

A last footnote in this story is that JESUS COULD NOT FREELY ENTER ANY TOWNS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL (v.45b).

“As a result, ...” the result of this Leper telling people of Jesus' healing alone restricts Jesus' ministry of preaching the Gospel. How is it? Well as you know, if people are gripped by the fever of saving their own skins in this life, they will naturally have no interest in anything else.

Firstly, we must not get our focus stuck on healing, thinking that if people see signs and wonders they will believe. No, they will come to believe only when they hear the Gospel preached, because the Gospel is the content of what the faith can cling onto. Healing are only signs to point us in the direction of the Gospel but sometimes they are not very clear signs as well.

In Asia and many parts of Africa, faith-healers are a dime a dozen. People claim healing from their gods, no matter what god they believe. Some go from gods to gods for healing. How can healing then be a sign pointing to the Gospel in this context? We can learn a lesson from this, that when we are praying for someone's healing we must not only pray for physical healing alone, but also spiritual healing. We must bring the preaching of the Gospel into our healing ministry.

Secondly, preaching is priority number one in the church. If a pastor is so gifted in healing broken hearts and he can counsel very well and many people flock to him today for counselling until he has no time to prepare for preaching and then starts to invite others to take on that role, would he have given up on his calling as a pastor?

What if he is such a good administrator that he can take care and manage the church so well that he makes everything run like clock-work. But because he is so good at this, he decides to hire many other pastors to preach and teach and he

becomes the senior pastor that administers the church only. Does he give up his calling as a pastor?

What is a pastor? He is someone who is like Jesus the Good Shepherd who preaches the Gospel faithfully, and he does without being side-tracked by other work. Let all pastors who are called to this ministry listen to this text. Let the congregation, church lay leaders also take note to help the pastor to fulfill his calling as a preacher of the Word.

Amen.

Holy Week

Maundy Thursday

For the first time, JCC practiced the Foot Washing ritual, with 5 volunteers.



The 2 pastors went from one to another washing their feet with water and drying them with a towel.

How did it feel to have a pastor washing your feet and another drying it? I asked Yew Moi and he said that it was a meaningful act.



Good Friday

Another first for JCC was the introduction of a wooden cross in the Good Friday Memorial Service on which members were asked to nail their sins, written on a piece of paper, on to the cross.



Easter Sun Rise Service

Another innovation for JCC will be the Easter Sun Rise service where early birds will rise and meet in church at 6.00 am and proceed to Jurong Lake to celebrate a worship service as the sun rises across the lake.

The light of the sun will dispel the darkness as the Light of Jesus shines victoriously on Easter day.



Cambodia Mission Trip 2006

Report by Lydia Sum

20th - 30th Mar



Our first destination—Kampong Thom International School

Day 1

Daily Activities: Delice, Hygiene talks, kids corner, medical clinic, computer class



COMPUTER CLASS 101

We got a new printer!! Operation blessing brought along 4 new computers and with a total of 12 computers, we managed to conduct 4 lessons, each lasting around 3 hours. Most of the kids are aged 8-12 and their enthusiasm to learn really amazes us!



Pei Wen and Lydia took charge here and the kids were taught how to operate Microsoft WORD and draw using PAINT. We were greatly encouraged at how talented all of them are! Their creativity is evident in their art work and we really thank God for His many blessings upon these shining bright stars.

Thankfully, language wasn't a barrier as we had a superb translator who's like an angel to us, bringing across what we have to say with such efficiency.



Though they are rather shy to ask questions initially, they gradually warmed up to us and began to ask for more: One even asked us to teach him PowerPoint though it wasn't in our lesson plan!



Day 2

It's 6.30am, time for morning devotion! Each morning, it was a custom to have praise and worship followed by some sharing of the Word. After which we leave for breakfast to start the day right.

5 of us—Joy, Daniel, Michelle, Kat and Su woon joined the adults at Baray Santuk Referral Hospital to help at kids' corner and the medical team while the rest stayed on at KTIS.



KIDS' CORNER

Each day about 40 kids from the neighborhood came to learn songs, dances, handicraft from us.



As Joanna, Stefanie, Nelson and Sharon brought much joy and laughter to these adorable little ones, they also brought in the Gospel in their teaching. In helping them make pretty bookmarks, the children are reminded that like these sheep, we too





need a shepherd to guide us and protect us from harm, and that Shepherd can only be Jesus Christ.

Day 3

This is the last day at Kampong Thom and we had the **evangelistic dinner**!! The children from KTIS went out to invite the public and won them over to attend this happening event with their welcoming smiles!



After a thanksgiving prayer from the pastor, the team proceeded to present a lively action song called “Whoo Hoo”. Following that



was a short skit.



Unexpectedly, we had a stunning cast of talented actors and actresses from among our team and with a tinge of humour, we brought across the message of ‘was lost but am now found’ in the skit of The prodigal son. Judging from the hearty laughter and warm applause from the crowd, we sort of concluded that they really enjoyed themselves!

Next on, we presented another touching song item—“People need the Lord”. With the aid of hand sign gestures and a mini silent skit which illustrates scenes as mentioned in the lyrics, the team delivered the spirit of the song.

After which, we all watched a Khmer movie titled “A broken woman”. The story goes on to show how a woman managed to love and forgive her enemy despite being abused. It is a ministering show and we believe many have benefited from it.

The pastor prayed for us in Khmer. Though we didn’t understand the language, we know He was interceding to God on behalf of the lost and for the church.

Dinner was a refreshing change from our daily staple of food. It was the first time some of us tasted sweet curry! It is custom for the villagers to cook these food only when there is a great celebration, and boy, are we honored to be the guests of this sumptuous banquet of sorts!



After dinner, we gave out pretty blinking pins to the children. It’s really heartening to see them so excited and happy upon receiving our humble gift.

With these twinkling red hearts pinned on their shirts, each of these little ones looked like little stars twinkling in the dim light, as if they were a mirror reflection of the majestic starlit sky above our very heads.

It was a sad yet cherished farewell as we left that night. Kampong Thom was the one village we’ve stayed the longest of all the places we have visited and most of us have grown attached to the people there.



Though reluctant to leave, we bid our adios, as cheerfully as we possibly could... hoping that the last memories we leave them with, will be that of smiles and happiness.



Day 4 School Visit Cum Carnival

After a good night's rest, we reported to Chhouk Khsach Health center at 8.30am.

As the adults attended to the medical clinic, we went to the school just opposite the clinic. This was the first time the school allowed a Christian organization to interact with the school kids and we really thank God for this golden opportunity to reach out to so many students.



First on, we presented the Singapore skit where the children got to know more about our multi-racial culture through a fun and interesting dialogue exchange. We did a dance too and soon after, they were dismissed for classes.



Meanwhile, we busied ourselves with the preparation for the carnival.



We had expected about 300-400 children but when the children came rushing to our stalls the moment the principal gave the go-ahead, we were rather overwhelmed.

When they rushed over to see what we've got to offer, the place became a hazy mess, literally. As the dust rose from all the running and shuffling, we tried to get the kids to queue up in lines. Crowd control was a problem for the children can't seem to understand what

we had wanted and were getting a little rowdy. As they edged closer and closer, we could only smile and gesticulate.

We have a variety of games and fun among which include hand painting, balloon sculpting, beads and necklace, golf, ring toss, pin the pig and catch me if you can.

All's well that ends well. Looking at those excited faces and triumphant smiles having scored a victory at the games stalls made all the work seemed worthwhile. After two hours of carnival fun for the kids, we were all exhausted and famished.

After lunch, we got a short tour around the nearby villages.



We returned to Phnom Penh shortly after 5pm and we enjoyed a most memorable dinner at the “Lotus swamp”. (Ask any mission tripper to find out what we ate!)



Day 5 Ferry to Lveasor Medical Clinic, Carnival

This day we travelled by boat to Bible Lveasor Baptist church. When we



reached land at Lveasor, we hopped onto the back of these motorcycles and Vroom! Vroom! Off we go! Since the roads were too narrow for buses to pass through, motorcycles and carts are the most convenient modes of transport.



It was an exciting and bumpy ride and for those who took on the cart ride—what an experience!! It was bumpier than a bumper car ride in a fun fair carnival. Kudos to the adults who were game enough to take on this ride!



As usual, the medical clinic was set up in a jiffy and before long, the patients started coming in. Some of us managed to get a first hand experience helping out in the dental work.

It was an eye opening experience as we saw how Aunty Theresa and Aunty Kim took charge

at the “operating table”. As they wield their surgical instruments with expertise, the bad tooth usually comes out without a fight. Though it was mostly smooth sailing, there were also knotty cases. In such



cases, we'll always have Uncle Yew Huat to pray for the patient and by grace, it works every time without fail!



To be continued in the next issue of The Vine.

Girls Brigade Enrolment 2006

2 April 2006 Three companies of GB girls from 3 different schools in Jurong congregated at JCC for an Enrolment Service.



The invited speaker, Dr Low Guat Tin, gave a rather entertaining sharing which went down well with the girls. She was able to communicate with her audience through the use of powerpoint and videos.

Dr Low thanked JCC for providing 16 people to guide the girls of the 3 companies. She reminded us that our efforts will not be wasted and our rewards will be a mighty harvest in heaven.



We must remember to thank God for these faithful workers although I am almost sure that hardly anyone knows who they are because they are working quietly and only the girls and God knows who they are.

Thank God also for the opportunity for JCC to reach out to the girls. May we not lose sight of our missionary mandate which is right here at our door steps.



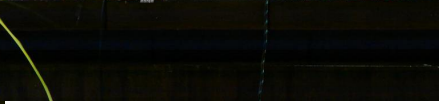
LCS

Sisters' Fellowship

22 April 2006

Sisters from most of the Lutheran churches met together to fellowship at JCC.

Presenting items in Mandarin and Hokkien were the JCC Chinese and English sections.



After a fellowship meal, there was a time of light exercises for the ladies led by sister Betsy Yee.



Advertisement:



The picture depicts the 6 major judges and those of you who took part in the Bible Quiz may realize it.

The upcoming class starting in July 2006 will have our Bible Quiz first prize winners as part of a team of teachers.

Look out for registration details soon and sign up and have a chance to win next year's Bible Quiz.

The Bethel Series



DOCTRINE OF PAIN

In the beginning, when man was created from dust, there was no sin and he knew no pain. Then, sin entered the world (no thanks to the wily serpent) and pain came to stay forever. Recall what God said after Adam and Eve sinned:

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Gen. 3:16)

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Gen. 3:17-19)

Note that two kinds of pains are referred to in God's rebuke above; namely, physical pain (in childbearing as well as in childbirth; thorns and thistles that might prick) and mental anguish (toiling for a living). It is understandable also that there is overlap between the two, as physical pain distresses us mentally while that which brings anguish to the mind carries elements of physical suffering (backbones aching, etc.)

Correction: Pain did not come into the world as a result of sin. Pain was already in God's planning for his creatures, to serve His purposes. For God said to Eve, "I will greatly increase your pains in ..." Observe that pain had already been a given; but, in consequence of the woman's disobedience of God's instruction, the pain would be amplified.

In thinking of pain as punishment, humans perceive it in both negative and positive light. When a father canes his child, the child hates it, gnashes his teeth and sometimes, in his infantile naiveté, may even conjure up thoughts of settling scores, especially when the purpose of the punishment is not properly explained. From the father's perspective, he loves his child and therefore he wields the cane. Proverbs 13:24 carries the message, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."

The foregoing illustration shows that the perspectives of the father and of the child are often at loggerheads. We may use this picture of conflict as a visual aid for our understanding of why our heavenly Father often inflicts pain on us for the sake of discipline; yet, as children, we often moan and protest without appreciation of the Father's love. "He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored." (Prov. 13:18) This is as valid for our reaction to God's discipline and correction as for children's response to punishment from their parents. Poverty and shame here may well refer to moral bankruptcy and abandonment. Examples of teens who have been brought down in their life because they had scorned to be taught are aplenty in the news. Discipline and correction is an ongoing process for as long as we live. So, regardless of our ages, we do well to heed the message of pain when we are disciplined so that we do not end up mourning and regretting as in Prov. 5:11-14 when we have reached the end of our tether in waywardness.

Pain is also used by God as a warning of danger. You may have heard that if a frog (being a cold-blooded animal) is placed in tepid water with the water temperature gently raised to 100°C, the frog will be boiled alive because its body would feel no pain from the rising heat. How would you like to be thankful to God if He does not bestow upon you the sensation of pain so that when you accidentally touch a hot iron, your hand will stay put and you will not shriek in pain? Obviously, not being in pain does not mean being spared from grief! In the frog story, the frog is boiled alive without being aware. This is just an urban legend. However, it is a fact that a blind person may be bled alive without being aware, if he is a diabetic who has lost the sensation of pain in his soles so that a deep cut on a sharp stone would serve him no painful warning while, being blind, he also has no sight of the bleeding. Putting ourselves in the shoes of such a pitiful person, we ought to appreciate the utility of pain and complain less when in pain.

Have you ever felt pain in the heart? One kind of it warns you that you have to hurry to the doctor because the pain may be an alert to an impending heart attack. Thank God for the warning alert! The other kind is when you are emotionally struck down by events in life. Frequent quarrels with someone you love (spouse, parent, child or sibling) bring you frequent pain in the heart, serving as an alarm. There are cases of people who pay heed to such an alarm and they take appropriate actions resulting in relationships being rescued from the brink and subsequently flourishing on the basis of improved mutual understanding and respect. Pain as such that is mutual between two persons can be a positive shot in the arm promoting timely action to salvage a bad situation. Of course, man in his sin is wont to look at an imagined dark side of pain with protestations to God instead of searching himself to find the real source of the pain. If the end result is downbeat, the problem is not with the pain but with his attitude towards it. Taking

another example, if one feels constant pain in the heart for staying at a particular place of dwelling or work, prayerfully one may discover that it is but God's compassionate shove to break our inertia, to bring about a pleasant change.

Recently, Martin Cheah had a fingertip almost severed in an accident. He felt no pain and as a result had to put up with a long wait at the A&E Department of the hospital because the medical staff did not realize the seriousness of his injury. Was the lack of pain good? Weeks after the fingertip had been sewn back, I felt it and gave it a light squeeze. He then reacted to some sensation of pain. I told him, "Good, this shows that the nerves on the finger are working fine." Thank God! It would have been a bad sign if he felt no sensation to the squeeze.

Not long after Martin's accident, my son had an accident when his heel was badly broken. At the A&E, the doctor bandaged up his foot and intended to give him a follow-up appointment. I knew that the injury was quite serious and had no patience to wait days for follow-up with the specialist. Thankfully, he was in excruciating pain and that was a blessing because it gave me support to request that he be admitted to the ward. With his admission, the specialist came to see him the next morning and arranged for surgery that very day. I see his accident as God-purposed for some lesson to be learned, and at the same time it had some indication of God's gracious dispensation in some other ways. I had feared a long recovery, but the pain that led to expeditious medical attention has brought about the good outcome that is beyond even the doctor's expectation of many months' incapacitation. He is now able to walk and travel without crutches. (While doctors do make mistakes, we ought to be thankful that God's oversight is always there to intervene with timeliness.)

Pain, as in Martin's case, gives an assurance of wellness without cancelling out whatever God-intended lesson for the injury. Similarly, the pain in my son's case gave the necessary push for decisive medical action after the hurt had served its God-intended purpose for him. Back to the illustration of a father inflicting physical pain on his child by the use of a cane, the loving intention of the punisher is for the punished to understand that there is the price for a mistake, but it is never his desire to prolong the agony after the lesson delivered is properly absorbed. Instead, in the aftermath of the punishment, reassurance will follow.

When God, the Father, instituted pain in His creation order, His omniscience extended beyond the moment into the distant future. When God, the Son, came into the world to be the propitiation for our sin, He himself would experience the same pain in body and mind. If man complains of every physical pain he cannot endure, how many times more does he by his wickedness (without wincing) bring the same pain to bear on Jesus on the Cross? Jesus, though divine,

was also capable of emotions. He felt pain in the heart as any person would for the loss of a loved one. (He wept as others did – John 11:35) He felt pain even if others wouldn't, for the wretched state of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). Jesus' sufferings were both the result of man's evil as they were a design for man's reflection. Rom. 8:16-17 says, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." In Matt. 16:24, Jesus further affirmed suffering as something not always to be disdained. (See also Philippians 1:29)

Can anyone ever hope to be able to avoid pain in life? The answer is obvious. We suffer (punitive) pain for doing evil, and we suffer (constructive) pain for doing good. While 1 Pet. 3:17 claims that it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil, I feel that it is not too bad either for us to see punitive pain in positive light as an agent to draw us away from the darkness of sin so that when we are tempted by our own evil desire, we have the warning (of pain) in the early stage of our misguidance. Being alerted to the evil, we can take timely steps to avoid being dragged further away to the point of no return when sin becomes full-grown and gives birth to death. Hence, James 1:13 is right in telling us not to blame God when we are tempted. In fact, we ought to be thankful to God for the warning; and, if we ignore the warning, we should blame ourselves for the consequence.

Pain, the constructive kind, is also seen in the trials we face – the trials that we should consider pure joy to experience, according to James 1, because it is good for the testing of our faith to develop perseverance. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12)

Since we know that pain in all its various manifestations is purposed by God, we should take it in our stride always. Yes, we do sometimes feel pained by pain that makes it difficult for us to bear. However, we may view the trial of pain as one that is common to man and take comfort from 1 Cor. 10:13 that we won't be tried beyond our strength. God does provide a way out for the faithful, via the vocations of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, counselors, psychologists, pastors, ... who can recommend good ways to manage the pain. Remember GOD IS AT WORK through human vocations to help us bear with what we have to bear in life. Soli Deo Gloria!

John Lee

Gospel of Judas

Foreword by Rev Martin Yee:

The publication of the Gospel of Judas by the renowned National Geographic Society last week has once again created a storm among Christians and Non-Christians. This so-called "Gospel", which depicts Judas as actually a "good guy" who "did Jesus a favor", is actually dangerous and blasphemous as the Canonical Gospels and Acts of the Apostles had unequivocally pronounced Judas as condemned. The interview quoted below gives a sound and balanced response to this new controversy. Orthodox Christian belief as defended by Bishop Athanasius and Irenaeus and others is once again challenged. May God help us.

ZENIT - The World Seen From Rome

(<http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=87247>)

Date: 2006-04-05

The "Gospel of Judas"

Interview With Father Thomas Williams, Theology Dean

ROME, APRIL 5, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)) - The National Geographic Society has announced its intentions to publish an English translation of an ancient text called "The Gospel of Judas" later this month.

The 31-page manuscript, written in Coptic, purportedly surfaced in Geneva in 1983 and has only been translated now.

ZENIT asked Legionary Father Thomas D. Williams, dean of theology at the Regina Apostolorum university in Rome, to comment on the relevance of the discovery.

Q: What is the "Gospel of Judas"?

Father Williams: Though the manuscript still must be authenticated, it likely represents a fourth- or fifth-century text, and is a copy of an earlier document produced by a Gnostic sect called the Cainites.

The document paints Judas Iscariot in a positive light, and describes him as obeying a divine ordinance in handing over Jesus to the authorities for the salvation of the world.

It may well be a copy of the "Gospel of Judas" referred to by St. Irenaeus of Lyons in his work "Against the Heresies," written around A.D. 180.

Q: If authentic, what challenge would this document pose to traditional Christian belief? Will it "shake Christianity to its foundations" as some press releases have suggested?

Father Williams: Certainly not. The Gnostic gospels, of which there are many besides this one, are not Christian documents per se, since they proceed from a syncretistic sect that incorporated elements from different religions, including Christianity.

From the moment of their appearance, the Christian community rejected these documents because of their incompatibility with the Christian faith.

The "Gospel of Judas" would be a document of this sort, which could have great historical value, since it contributes to our knowledge of the Gnostic movement, but it poses no direct challenge to Christianity.

Q: Is it true that the Church has tried to cover up this text and other apocryphal texts?

Father Williams: These are myths circulated by Dan Brown and other conspiracy theorists. You can go to any Catholic bookstore and pick up a copy of the Gnostic gospels. Christians may not believe them to be true, but there is no attempt to hide them.

Q: But doesn't an early document of this sort rival orthodox Christian sources, such as the four canonical Gospels?

Father Williams: Remember that Gnosticism arose in the middle of the second century, and the "Gospel of Judas," if authentic, probably dates back to the mid- to late second century.

To put a historical perspective on things, that would be like you or me writing a text now on the American Civil War and having that text later used as a primary historical source on the war. The text could not have been written by eyewitnesses, the way at least two of the canonical Gospels were.

Q: Why would the leaders of the Gnostic movement have been interested in Judas?

Father Williams: One of the major differences between Gnostic belief and that of Christianity concerns the origins of evil in the universe.

Christians believe that a good God created a good world, and that through the abuse of free will, sin and corruption entered the world and produced disorder and suffering. The Gnostics blamed God for the evil in the world and claimed that he created the world in a disordered and flawed way. Thus they champion the rehabilitation of Old Testament figures such as Cain, who killed his brother Abel, and Esau, the elder brother of Jacob, who sold his birthright for a plate of pottage. Judas fits perfectly into the Gnostic agenda of showing that God intends evil for the world.

Q: But wasn't Judas' betrayal a necessary part of God's plan, as this text suggests?

Father Williams: Being omniscient, God knows full well what choices we will make and weaves even our bad decisions into his providential plan for the world.

In his last published book, Pope John Paul II eloquently reflected on how God continues to bring good out of even the worst evil that man can produce. That doesn't mean, however, that God intends for us to do evil, or that he intended for Judas to betray Jesus. If it wasn't Judas, it would have been someone else. The authorities had already decided to put Jesus to death, and it was just a matter of time.

Q: What is the Church's position regarding Judas? Is it possible to "rehabilitate" him?

Father Williams: Though the Catholic Church has a canonization process by which it declares certain persons to be in heaven, as saints, it has no such process for declaring people to be condemned.

Historically, many have thought that Judas is probably in hell, because of Jesus' severe indictment of Judas: "It would be better for that man if he had never been born," as he says in Matthew 26:24. But even these words do not offer conclusive evidence regarding his fate.

In his 1994 book, "Crossing the Threshold of Hope," Pope John Paul II wrote that Jesus' words "do not allude for certain to eternal damnation."

Q: But if anyone deserves hell, wouldn't it be Judas?

Father Williams: Surely many people deserve hell, but we must remember that the mercy of God is infinitely greater than our wickedness.

Peter and Judas committed very similar faults: Peter denied Jesus three times, and Judas handed him over. And yet now Peter is remembered as a saint and Judas simply as the traitor.

The main difference between the two is not the nature or gravity of their sin, but rather their willingness to accept God's mercy. Peter wept for his sins, came back to Jesus, and was pardoned. The Gospel describes Judas as hanging himself in despair.

Q: Why is the "Gospel of Judas" arousing so much interest?

Father Williams: Such theories regarding Judas are certainly not new.

It's enough to remember the 1973 play "Jesus Christ Superstar," where Judas sings, "I have no thought at all about my own reward. I really didn't come here of my own accord," or Taylor Caldwell's 1977 novel "I, Judas."

The enormous economic success of "The Da Vinci Code" has undoubtedly stirred up the pot, and provided financial incentive for theories of this sort.

Michael Baigent, author of "Holy Blood, Holy Grail," now has a book out called "The Jesus Papers," which recycles the old story that Jesus survived the crucifixion.

And a newly released "scientific" study asserts that meteorological conditions could have been such that Jesus really walked on ice, when the Gospels say he walked on water.

Basically, for those who reject outright the possibility of miracles, any theory, outlandish as it may be, trumps Christian claims. Ω

HAPPENINGS In March/April 2006

1. Baptism of Adeline, Dennis and Darren. (26 Mar)
2. Visit from the New Dawn Team. (26 Mar)
3. Romanized Hokkien Training. (25 Mar)
4. 38th AGM (9 Apr)
5. Shepherd/Leaders Fellowship (8 Apr)

Many activities have taken place but these were recorded so that you may know that JCC is a very active church.



Palm Sunday

JCC celebrated Palm Sunday on 9 Apr. Palm branches were waved during the service in remembrance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. At the end of the services, what happens to the palm branches? Do we dispose of them into the waste bin as what the street cleaners of old Jerusalem must have done, or do we bring it home like the Catholics do? Throwing it away so ignominiously seems better than making it into an item of idol worship.



I remember my mother thinks that the palm branch has power to ward off evil.



So what did you do with your palm branches?

Martin Cheah

From a strictly mathematical viewpoint:

What Equals 100%? What does it mean to give MORE than 100%? Ever wonder about those people who say they are giving more than 100%? We have all been in situations where someone wants you to give over 100%. How about achieving 101%? What equals 100% in life? Here's a little mathematical formula that might help you answer these Questions:

If: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
is represented as:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26, then:

H-A-R-D-W-O-R-K
 $8+1+18+4+23+15+18+11 = 98%$ and

K-N-O-W-L-E-D-G-E
 $11+14+15+23+12+5+4+7+5 = 96%$ but

A-T-T-I-T-U-D-E
 $1+20+20+9+20+21+4+5 = 100%$

AND, look how far the love of God will take you

L-O-V-E-O-F-G-O-D
 $12+15+22+5+15+6+7+15+4 = 101%$

Therefore, one can conclude with mathematical certainty that: While Hard work and Knowledge will get you close, and Attitude will get you there, it's the Love of God that will put you over the top!

Easter Sunday 16 April, 2006.

For the record many things happened today. There was baptism (*Joshua, Roger, Keidi and Pauline*), confirmation (*Evania, Lester, Josiah and Isaiah*) and transfer of membership (*Abel Kng and Lim Teck Ann*). The Kids' Church presented an item during the offering and after service, there was Easter Eggs for everyone.

Also, there were some brothers who quietly cleaned up the church where it cannot be seen – the roof. A dangerous, but low profile task.

