

The Vine

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EDITOR'S WORD

After 4 years in an educational institution, most youths are looking forward eagerly to that school end bash (usually called the Prom Night) where they can dress their best, at a princely ransom, which their parents have to pay. Not many parents begrudge paying hundreds of dollars to parade their children in their best dress. Maybe there will be some who will drown themselves if their child is enamored with Andy Lau, but that is a rarity.

Every now and then around the Chinese 8th month, we might receive invitations to a friend's or colleague's wedding celebration. Hopefully, we are happy to be invited although it would mean an Ang Pow of somewhere between \$60 to \$120. If you are a very friendly person, you may receive even more invitations then you can bear but the Ang Pows must come even if you don't.

Maybe once a month, we might invite our family to a meal at a fancy restaurant, burning a hole in our

pockets around \$200 to \$300. A cheaper alternative would be the neighborhood "Cher Char" stall which costs about \$80 to \$120.

Could you be a theatre goer who for the love of the Phantom of the Opera is willing to part with \$160 for a ticket?

Then again you may be one of those tai tais or lady doctors who think nothing of spending thousands of dollars for a dress which they will wear only once.

Well, here is your chance to splurge \$40 per person for a dinner in celebration of JCC's 40th Anniversary to be held on 30th June 2007 at the Chevrons. If you are one of the category mentioned above, then \$40 is nothing, peanuts in comparison, it is only \$1 a year for 40 years. As the MM would have said it, you have to view what you pay in perspective.

Martin Cheah



It is not that we have been faithful to God but that He has been faithful to us.

A Reason to Celebrate

- The Law Society of Singapore celebrates its 40th birthday on 11 February 2007
- The Singapore Food Manufacturers' Association 40th anniversary celebration dinner, 12 January 2007
- In conjunction with the Women's Executive Committee's 40th Anniversary and International Women's Day 2007, the Council will publish a WEC 40th Anniversary Book.
- To tie in with the upcoming 40th anniversary of NS in 2007, the Committee recommended a 40th NS Anniversary Bonus for 700,000 serving and ex-NSmen.
- The Association of South-East Asian Nations or ASEAN turns 40 this year.
- SAF Yacht Club 40th Anniversary Bash on 4th June 2007.



When people celebrate, they think of all the good things worth the memory. If you are a member of the Law Society, Singapore Food Manufacturers' Association, Women's Executive Committee, ASEAN or the SAF Yacht Club, then good things runneth over many times for you because you will have so much of fond reminiscence more than the rest of us who only have Jurong Christian Church's 40th Anniversary to celebrate this year.

If you are 10 years old this year, you will probably be around to celebrate JCC's 100th Anniversary in 2067. By the way, that will probably be the last time JCC celebrates an anniversary at No. 2 Tah Ching Road because the lease for the land will be expired thereafter. However, for most of us upstairs (nearer to Heaven), we may have to celebrate this 40th Anniversary for all its worth of nostalgia as much as we can, for we do not know whether we will be around to celebrate the 50th anniversary and so on. Even if we are still around to celebrate the 50th anniversary, we probably will not have the physical stamina to get up and boogie anymore.

How is our 40 years such a grand occasion to celebrate? Different persons may think differently about the praiseworthiness of our 40 years of achievement. If we were to focus our celebrations on individual sentiments, some may have disappointments to grouse because over the last 40 years they feel we have not grown more spiritual, nor more holy, nor more in numbers or finance. Conversely, others who have flourished in the spiritual realm and life's everyday blessings will feel thankful to God for all sweet recollections.

Reality is that the better experiences and the not-so-favourable are always in a certain mix in a world that is imperfect. The church is composed of diverse individuals who are alike in being short of the glory of God. Human weaknesses and failings are all part and parcel of a larger divine purpose.

God is in control so that the stronger will survive with less difficulty and the weaker will still find strength to persevere in prayers. In summary, God is faithful to all His faithfuls. We are not short of examples of perseverance in Jurong Christian Church – amply manifesting the tough never-say-die, never-say-quit attitude. We just need to look closer.

For the church as a whole, in the foregoing 40 years, there were the faithfuls who have run the race, who have been called home to be with the Lord. There are faithfuls who have grown up into Christian maturity all the years here with us from the days of their spiritual infancy or youth. Yes, we have members joining and leaving, all very natural migration due to moving house, following their spouse upon marriage, responding to God's calling to serve in different places of harvest, and so forth. They are no loss to the Kingdom. We should be thankful for the privilege that God has given us to contribute what little we as a body have been able to give for the individual fine Christians' spiritual growth and service development.



Maybe you can recall, Michael Christian, who is now serving as a missionary to Nias, or Jerry Lam, who is with OM in Sarawak, Ting Ching, who runs an After School Care Centre and even Molly Chua, who is a missionary in Swansea, Wales. They were all seedlings which grew up in the fertile soil of JCC. Should we be disappointed? Visualize JCC as parents whose children have grown up and left the nest. Or consider JCC as a training ground for novice full time staff. Many a young pastor has passed through the hallowed halls of JCC as they first started out after graduation.

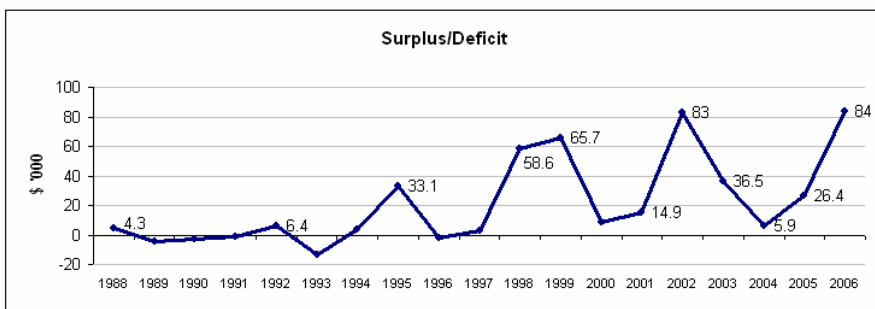
As a congregation, we have not been serving God with selfish individualism. We are part of the larger Lutheran Church in Singapore. Little drops of our effort together with drops contributed by our brothers and sisters in Christ in the various other Lutheran congregations and outreach groups like the TGNC, GMB, LCCS and Seafarers' Mission do make for gains that we see (with satisfaction) yet not see in perfect clarity (so that we might not be tempted to rest on our laurels). Even in the Boys' and Girls' Brigades, there have been positive, encouraging experiences but we do not necessarily have to see all the boys and girls who have graduated to serve the Lord remain here in Jurong against the will of God for them to harvest in other fields. Are we so narrow-minded spiritually? No, in our celebration of 40 years, we don't focus on individuals. We focus

on God and His faithfulness and grace to JCC, regardless of our weakness and failings, through the thick and thin of our spiritual walk. Then we truly have a good reason to celebrate.

God has been good to us, patient and long-suffering, gently guiding us like a father guiding His feeble child. The reason to celebrate is not our goodness but our Father's faithfulness. As God's people, we are victorious through trials and tribulations. Though in celebration, we retain our humility in acknowledgment of the fact that in our weakness, we continually need to depend on the Holy Spirit for our next lap of the race.

God has blessed us in more ways than we can imagine. Even as we traced through the records of the church's financial statements, we see an upward trend in the surpluses which the Lord has blessed us with over the years since 1988. Yes, there were the down years but that's when Martin Cheah was serving as Treasurer. So, don't vote for him again.

Indeed there are many reasons to celebrate, so Come On and Celebrate.



The Editors



The youths went door to door and managed to collect bags of food from the generous people in the surrounding blocks.

EASTER SUNDAY

8th April 2007

Immediately after the Easter service, a selected group of brothers and sisters were asked to share some thoughts of their 40 years with Jurong Christian Church. What comes out of this we hope will be an interesting video to be shown during the 40th Anniversary Dinner Celebrations. However, this is not the main point of this story. This is the story about Peter, who spent about 2 hours on the video taping and immediately after that continued another 2 hours on the dialect song practices.



Then at about 4.00 pm the Dialect Ministry set out in a number of cars to the Singapore General Hospital to visit the patients to bring them Easter cheer. At the SGH, we were told to be discreet and sensitive to the patients' religious persuasions. Unlike the previous time we visited a hospital, this time we were the only group. Our contacts showed us the map of the ward and told us to go forth while they stayed

back to support us with prayer.

I am sure we went forth, not with great expectations, but with fear and trembling. Therefore, what happened next cannot be attributed to our great talent for singing but rather to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was moving peoples' hearts even as we sang. Suddenly we found people crying and asking for prayers, people from other rooms coming over to join us in the singing, and even as we went from room to room, we had to leave team members behind to tend to the need of the patients.



Peter who lead us to the first room, had to be left behind with some of the team, to talk to some of the patients while the rest moved on to the next

room. Yet the Spirit raised up Esther for a time such as this to lead the team in the singing while Peter was indisposed.

By the time we finished singing and debriefing, it was already 8.00 pm in the night. What a long day it was for Peter. Yet I think, he was strengthened by the Spirit and did not feel tired.



There is something about seeing the peoples' reaction that gave us the joy of the Lord and therefore the strength to encore the songs about 7 times over the various rooms of ward 74. Cassidy our only guitarist must have had very sore fingers by that time with 2 hours of practices earlier but not a complaint from him.

In all, about 22 people asked for prayer. May we continue to remember them in our prayers and that God will be merciful to these people. Three weeks later, Peter revisited ward 74 and found that most of the patients have already left the hospital. It is a stark reminder that God has a short window time for us to act and if we don't grab it, we may miss the chance.



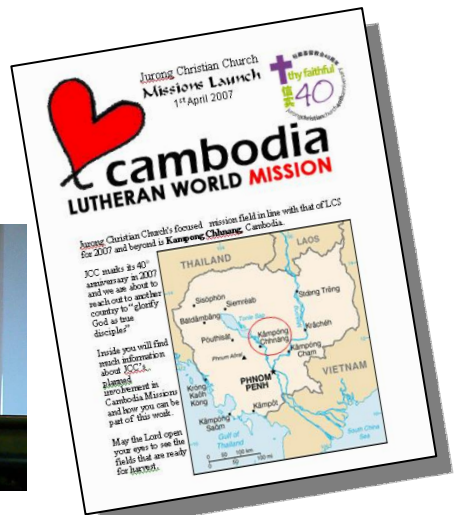
Three Baptisms and a confirmation were held during the Easter Sunday service.

Edison Ng, Carine Loy and Lim Li Khim were baptized by Rev Martin Yee. Zachariah Yeap, son of Soon Eong and Ewe Ewe, was



confirmed.





1st April 2007, the Mission Committee officially launched the Love Cambodia Missions Project.



JCC members were shown 2 videos and a Powerpoint. Two Cambodian sisters studying in SBC were also invited to share about Cambodia. Rev William Chang was invited to the pulpit to share a word and to challenge the members to missions in Cambodia. A number of members were indeed challenged and came forward for prayer. There was also a photo display and a color brochure to

add to the impact of the launch.

The people were indeed challenged and we managed to meet our targets in fund raising. We were also able to raise one team for a mission trip in April. We are hoping to raise another team for the coming June mission trip. Part of missions is also training and this will be conducted in July 2007 in JCC.





Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.' "The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

Exodus 32:27-29

Bro. James Sum asked me: How does the above command to kill your brother and friend and neighbour square with the second greatest commandment of God, "Love your neighbour as yourself"?

It is an interesting question. On first reading, it does seem odd that God should command the people of Israel to kill one another without regard to kith and kin. How cruel! It behoves us to look closer at the reason for the command in Exodus in the context of the situation of rebellion against God that Moses was faced with.

The whole chapter 32 of Exodus tells of how the multitudes were getting impatient while Moses was up in the Mount receiving the law from God. Impatience was certainly no excuse for the people to give up on waiting for God's revelation in due course and to abandon God. As it happened, the Israelites 'forgot' about the favour God had bestowed upon them in freeing them from Egypt. God had in his plan to deliver them to the Promised Land, but they begrudged waiting for their leader (Moses) to return. They pressured Aaron to make the golden calf, and they offered sacrifices to this idol. Their impetuous action was a grave sin against God, for it was only a few days earlier that they were warned:

" You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in

the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,”
(Ex 20:4-5)

Not only the warning, but also their promise, “*We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.*” (Ex. 24:7) Their memory was short, indeed!

When confronted by Moses, Aaron did nothing better than all and sundry sinners who are wont to explain away their sins when exposed. He conjured up an excuse: “*Do not be angry, my lord. You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'*” (Ex. 32:22-23)

In essence, Aaron was trying to 1) exonerate himself by shifting the focus of sin onto the people, 2) explain away the sinning by putting it down to a natural proclivity (“*how prone these people are to evil*”) and 3) suggest that Moses was partly the cause for being away for so long without information.

Even if what he said was truthful, it only showed up the failure of his responsibility. Instead of taking his leadership role seriously in guiding his charges, he allowed himself to be led by the detestable demands of the people to submit to idolatry. Temptations are to be expected in an ongoing battle between good and evil, but submitting to the temptations requires a willing act; it cannot be forced upon anyone. If Moses was away by God’s arrangement, and God had put in place Aaron as a stand-in, then to hint at some responsibility on the part of Moses for being away for too long without news would be to imply that God was himself at fault in some way. The excuse conjured by Aaron could not have been more flippant. It was indeed laughable (“*They gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire and out came the calf,*” Ex. 32:24) if not for the extreme seriousness of the matter, as the warning at Ex. 20:4-5 evokes.

So, it is easily understandable the basis of God's wrath when Aaron and his charges flagrantly violated His commandment and, instead of being contrite, they sought to rationalize away their transgression. Harsh punishment was to be expected. On the surface of it, it would seem that God was merciless in exacting the penalty from the people who must be quaking badly in their boots (or whatever form of footwear they were wearing at that time). But hold on to your conclusion as you read on.

God is the creator of the world, of all the living and non-living things, and so everything (animate or inanimate) is his to build up and his to tear down. By analogy, if you are a builder and you see anything not right with your handiwork, it is within your ownership right to destroy it and rebuild wholly or, if you choose, to just deal with parts of it as you deem fit. As recorded in Genesis, when God was grieved by his creation (Gen. 6:7), he decided to save some and strike out some by way of the Great Flood. If he wanted, he could have just wiped out the whole Earth and rebuilt afresh, but this was clearly not his choice when he gave the instructions to Noah to conserve two of every kind of creature.

Throughout the Bible, we read of God's love; but implicit in the great love is that God cannot condone sin and the right signal must be sent to the people who treated their creator God with scorn by their blatant contempt of the stark warning to desist from worshipping other gods. Yet love carries forgiveness. Balancing the need to punish and the deepest feeling to extend clemency (not that any deserved), God did not harden his heart completely. In the end, he did spare most of the Israelites from the immediate execution that he, as creator God and proper Judge of his creation, was perfectly authorized to mete out. Ex. 32:28 tells us that about 3000 died, which was but a fraction of the people there. It can be surmised that after some distressing moments of trembling under God's wrath as communicated through his servant, Moses, a majority of the Israelites did come to their senses, backtrack from their idolatry and stand aside as "for the LORD." (Ex. 32:26) They were forgiven. Those who stayed put in their scornfulness or disparagement of Moses' authority, persisting in their bliss with such abominable sin, were then the ones justifiably eliminated lest their wickedness spread and contaminate the rest. The discriminating

execution also served as a robust warning to the remaining Israelites to take God's commandments seriously.

Now the conclusion. The command in Ex. 32:27-29 does not contradict the second greatest commandment of God, which is to love your neighbour as yourself. Do not read this Exodus passage in isolation, but identify the surface message with the underlying detail of the extreme event taking place. By love, God forgives. By love, God must also eradicate evil that is developing into a menacing contagion. Carrying out the latter is always painful, but cannot be avoided. Suppose that you have a brother who commits treason that carries the death penalty. If you deliver him up to the authority, he will be executed. If you do nothing about him, the country is in grave peril. What would you do? When the idol worshippers persisted in their abominable merriment without caring a hoot about God's fury, the Father had no choice but to act decisively even if it pained his heart (on account of love) to do so.

John Lee

Were you there when they nailed their sins to the cross?



Starting on **Tuesday 3rd July 2007**
at JCC MPH. A 10 week course
covering God's purpose in
Missions, history of Missions and
some methods of Missions.

TRANSLATING A MESSAGE

I believe that many readers are familiar with the “passing the message” game. To play the game, you line up the players and then someone shares a message with the first in line, who will then pass the message orally to the one next to him and this person will then pass on the message to the next, and so on. By the time the last person receives the message, it would have been distorted beyond any recognition.

Suppose you try to play a little “translating the message” game, which is a more interesting variation of the “passing the message” game. Firstly, you share a short message in Chinese with the first person, who then translates it into English and passes it on to the next person. The receiving person translates it into Chinese again and passes on to the next person ... The passing on continues with translations alternating between the two languages until the last person in the row receives the final translation.

Assume that the players are all novices (not experts) in doing translations, each with his share of errors as they sometimes translate in word-by-word style. So the errors build up as the translations move down the line.

Let’s take this as the message in Chinese that the first player receives:

Original Message

有人抱着自己的婴孩来见耶稣，要他摸他们；门徒看见就责备那些人。耶稣却叫他们来，说：“让小孩子到我这里来，不要禁止他们；因为在神国的，正是这样的人。我实在告诉你们，凡要承受神国的，若不象小孩子，断不能进去。”

《路加福音》十八章15至17节（新约全书一和合本）

After going through successive degradations, the message received by the final player becomes:

Final translation in English

Certain people hugging baby to see Jesus wanted him to touch; the disciples saw and blamed them. Jesus in fact told them: "Let this child come here, do not have to forbid; in the country of God, precisely is such person. I really tell you, anyone who wants to bear with the country of God, if he does not look like a child, he will not be able to go in even if he is broke." Luke 18:15-17

If you understand both languages, you easily realize how distortions have set in and the final product is quite unacceptable. That the original message has come to the state of being twisted is not due to a single translation effort, but to a succession of boo-boos like these perhaps:

抱 → carry → 拥抱 → hugging
神国 → country of God
婴孩 → baby (in the singular instead of plural)
承受 → bear (direct dictionary meaning)
断 → broken → 破了 → broken → 破了产 → broke

If you think that the example is an exaggeration, so be it to give accent to my point. Silly as the errors may be, good for some mirth, I hope that a serious point is not lost in the amusement. Funny messages arise due to errors in a transmission chain. Misinterpretations and misquotes of Scripture do happen in the same way.

At times, Christians do create jokes when sharing a message read in one language to someone in a different language. (E.g., reading the Bible in English and sharing it in a dialect with limited vocabulary.) It also happens when we try to repeat a translation that we had heard before and in the process we add our "extras" to the message. To be careful about inadvertent distortion of facts does not of course mean that we should not make the effort to share the Gospel, no matter how

limited our linguistic talent is. Being aware of possible pitfalls, we will just be more alert and then we won't be committing such bad defects of translation as in the above example. Sometimes, instead of a pure translation, a paraphrase may do better in carrying across the substance of the message. This is because precise words or phrases of equivalent meaning may just not be available in the translated language to do justice to the source message.

INTERPRETING WHAT WE READ

Just as we have to be careful when sharing a message, we too have to be careful when trying to interpret a message we glean from a magazine or read in a translation of Scripture. We cannot interpret solely on the basis of detached words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. Every single word, phrase ... has to be interpreted in the context of the whole environment (comprising physical, social and spiritual settings). When studying the Bible, those gifted in languages may find it helpful to be familiar with different languages (English, Greek and Hebrew, for example) and hence be able to gain perspectives from the cross-referencing and multi-cultural ambience, not only in terms of understanding the Scripture but also in exploring the diversity of cultures and minds in grasping the nuances of physical, social and spiritual truths in the different linguistic expressions.

Nobody says that everybody ought to start signing up for language courses in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and what-have-you or else we would be the worse for our ability to understand what we read in the Bible. And we do not have to hold back (from sharing) out of diffidence due to perceived language inaptitude. Certainly, if we know people who are enterprising or enthusiastic about “touching base” in their learning of God's Word by seeking out Greek and Hebrew roots or original manuscripts, let them be and give them encouragement. Do not dispute the necessity. On the other hand, as relevant to the vast majority of Christians, we do not need to doubt the accuracy of the Bible as translated by scholars in Biblical interpretations. We know that immense skills are involved in the works of these scholars to bring the Scripture to ordinary folks in comprehensible languages and formats – sometimes paraphrases. How can we shoo off these works (translated Scriptures in our languages) as incapable of satisfying our needs for spiritual illumination?

God sets different plans for different people – whether they are the type who enjoy the adventure of exploring truths by the employment of multiple languages in their study of Scripture or they are the type who are contented with a good Book in their own comfortable language. Whichever type we belong to, we can apply commonsensical caution on reading and interpreting by not treating words and sentences in Scripture as disjointed pieces, for our own spiritual gains or for the benefits of those we reach out to when we have to communicate what we read or even do a translation into the language of our listener.

John Lee



GB Enrolment

15th April 2007

Girls' Brigade Enrolment Service with speaker **Molly Chua**, missionary from Swansea,

Wales.

