

The Vine

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Treasurer's Tales

George W. Truett, a well-known pastor, was invited to dinner in the home of a very wealthy man in Texas. After the meal, the host led him to a place where they could get a good view of the surrounding area.

Pointing to the oil wells punctuating the landscape, he boasted, "Twenty-five years ago I had nothing. Now, as far as you can see, it's all mine." Looking in the opposite direction at his sprawling fields of grain, he said, "That's all mine." Turning east toward huge herds of cattle, he bragged, "They're all mine." Then pointing to the west and a beautiful forest, he exclaimed, "That too is all mine."

He paused, expecting Dr. Truett to compliment him on his great success. Truett, however, placing one hand on the man's shoulder and pointing heavenward with the other, simply said, "How much do you have in that direction?" The man hung his head and confessed, "I never thought of that."

Leo Tolstoy once wrote a story about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his lot. He wanted more of everything. One day he received a novel offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in a day. The only catch in the deal was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown. Early the next morning he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday he was very tired, but he kept going, covering more and more ground. Well into

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray my Cuisinart to keep
I pray my stocks are on the rise
And that my analyst is wise
That all the wine I sip is white
And that my hot tub's watertight
That racquetball won't get too tough
That all my sushi's fresh enough
I pray my cordless phone still works
That my career won't lose its perks
My microwave won't radiate
My condo won't depreciate
I pray my health club doesn't close
And that my money market grows
If I go broke before I wake
I pray my Volvo they won't take.

Steve Farrar

the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. He quickened his pace and as the sun began to sink low in the sky, he began to run, knowing that if he did not make it back by sundown the opportunity to become an even bigger landholder would be lost. As the sun began to sink below the horizon he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and

I'll never forget a conversation I had with the late Corrie ten Boom. she said to me, in her broken English, "Chuck, I've learned that we must hold everything loosely, because when I grip it tightly, it hurts when the Father pries my fingers loose and takes it from me!"

Charles Swindoll

and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed, blood streaming from his mouth. In a few minutes he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. The title of Tolstoy's story was: **How Much Land Does a Man Need?**

John G. Wendel and his sisters were some of the most miserly people of all time. Although they had received a huge inheritance from their parents, they spent very little of it and did all they could to keep their wealth for themselves. John was able to influence five of his six sisters never to marry, and they lived in the same house in New York City for 50 years. When the last sister died in 1931, her estate was valued at more than \$100 million. Her only dress was one that she had made herself, and she had worn it for 25 years.

When a person with experience meets a person with money, the person with experience will get the money. And the person with the money will get experience.

Leonard Lauder

The Wendels had such a compulsion to hold on to their possessions that they lived like paupers. Even worse, they were like the kind of person Jesus referred to "who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

There are two ways in which a Christian may view his money--"How much of my money shall I use for God?" or "How much of God's money shall I use for myself?"

W. Graham Scroggie.

A.W. Tozer reminds us:

"Money often comes between men and God. Someone has said that you can take two small ten-cent pieces, just two dimes, and shut out the view of a panoramic landscape. Go to the mountains and just hold two coins closely in front of your eyes--the mountains are still there, but you cannot see them at all because there is a dime shutting off the vision in each eye."

It doesn't take large quantities of money to come between us and God; just a little, placed in the wrong position, will effectively obscure our view.

One day a certain old, rich man of a miserable disposition visited a rabbi, who took the rich man by the hand and led him to a window. "Look out there," he said. The rich man looked into the street. "What do you see?" asked the rabbi. "I see men, women, and children," answered the rich man. Again the rabbi took him by the hand and this time led him to a mirror. "Now what do you see?" "Now I see myself," the rich man replied.

Before borrowing money from a friend, decide which you need more.

Addison H. Hallock

Then the rabbi said, "Behold, in the window there is glass, and in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, but you see only yourself."

I hope you like all these stories and quotes which I gathered from the Internet. It is my hope that you do not find any similarities between yourselves and any of the characters in the stories above. Indeed there are many things we can do with money, eg. feed ourselves until we get gout (which is frequently referred to as a rich man's disease) or high cholesterol or overweight and out of shape. Alternatively, we could use it to feed others, the poor, the widows and orphans, the victims of Cyclone Nargis, etc. As disasters come one after another, don't you think its time to place our money into more worthwhile investments than ourselves?

I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.

Martin Luther.

Martin Cheah

Is God Fair? Maybe Not, but He's Right

Daniel Darling

*“What I believe about God is the most important thing about me” --
A.W. Tozer*

As I looked across the table at her, I could still see the pain in her eyes. She had been rejected years ago, but the hurt was still fresh. Linda Sullivan, my mother-in-law had grown up in a Christian family and had harbored dreams of working with young children, showing them the love of Christ. She met a young man at a Christian youth camp and soon married him. He was going to be a lawyer, but he could have been a pastor. That’s how people felt about him. When they both walked down the aisle it would be the beginning of a great life together.

But, Linda’s dreams were shattered only a few years into her marriage. She was pregnant with their third child when her husband announced that he was walking out on the marriage. He was in love with someone else. Another man.

When I look at her to this day, I see a survivor, a woman who has been through life’s worst trials. Linda had to work two jobs to support her children. She saw two of her children get involved in drugs and alcohol abuse. And three years ago, she nearly died from a quadruple bypass.

When I first heard my mother-in-law’s story, my first thought was, *That’s really unfair! All she wanted was a good, Christian family and instead she had to patch together a dysfunctional survival.*

When God Isn’t Fair

In a parable He shared with his disciples, Jesus seemed to suggest the very notion the Heavenly Father does not always deal with his children in a way that seem equitable. In [Matthew 20](#), Jesus paints a portrait of the Kingdom that looks and sounds so patently unjust that were it a reality today, most Christians would scream out at the injustice. But, amazingly, Jesus used this as a picture of how God deals with His children.

Jesus tells the story of a farmer, who represents God. Needing to harvest a bumper crop in his vineyard, he goes into the marketplace and hires a crew of laborers. He promises them a fair day’s wage.

Later in the day, he realizes he'll need more help. So he again goes to the marketplace and hires a few more men looking for work.

He does this several more times and hires his last crew with just an hour of harvesting remaining. But at the end of the day, the master of the vineyard gave each worker the same pay, regardless of how long they worked.

In our world this seems patently unfair. But, when we look at this story through the lens of grace, instead of the unbending scales of justice, we begin to understand the difference between our thinking and God's. Jesus made the careful, firm argument that what is fair to man isn't always right in the eyes of God.

You and I would say those who toiled the hardest and longest should be rewarded more. But Jesus saw it differently. Those ungrateful workers might have well been unemployed if not for the opportunity presented by the master of the vineyard.

Is it their right to question his generosity? Weren't they paid their promised wage? We would scream at the injustice, but we'd be wrong. This parable illustrates the broad theme of Scripture: God's grace. Just like the idle workers in the marketplace, we were all in a position of need. They were looking for a job, but we are looking for mercy.

The master of the vineyard wasn't concerned with how long the workers were unemployed—He only knew they needed a job. Similarly, God doesn't see the amount of sin we carry. In His eyes, we are all sinners in need of salvation. We are all in need of grace.

The Heart of God Revealed At the Cross

Random tragedy and heartbreak seem to point to a God who is either detached from humanity or has no control over the world. However, the true heart of God is revealed at the spectacle that took place 2,000 years ago on a hill called Calvary.

First, God's is infinitely just. And from the Garden of Eden to the present day, all men have sinned and violated God's holy order ([Romans 3:23](#)). No matter how small, this sin has a penalty—death, separation from God forever ([Romans 6:23](#)).

Yet, while the cross reveals God's justice, it also reveals His great love. God sent His son, Jesus to take the punishment for man's sin because man couldn't possibly redeem himself. ([2 Cor 5:21](#)). This was the greatest act of love ([1 John 4:9](#)).

This was the greatest agony for the heart of a holy God wasn't watching his Son beaten to a pulp and crucified; it was in the knowledge that His perfect Son would assume all the sin of mankind.

These actions don't strike me as terribly fair. The crucifixion was the greatest injustice in the history of the world. And yet, it was allowed by God for the payment of our sin.

What Do We Deserve?

So in light of the cross, what really do we deserve? Anyone who has been redeemed by God can no longer view themselves as having been treated unfairly by God. The gift of His son at salvation was both a gift we never deserved and yet a terrible injustice on our account. The reality is that we are not owed anything by God. Instead we owe Him a debt of love we can never repay. The hymn, "Come Thou Fount" says it best in its third verse:

"O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!"

Grace gives us the proper perspective on life's seeming injustices. As hard as it is to fathom, the most tragedy-struck Christian has tasted overwhelming amounts of God's grace. More than even that soul deserved.

So if we were to be completely honest, we wouldn't want God to be fair. If He was, then He wouldn't have sent Jesus to pay for our sins and we would be bound for a hopeless eternity. And He wouldn't walk beside us daily, giving us strength. He wouldn't extend His hand of forgiveness when we fail.

Instead, we should be glad we serve a God who is right.

Because we're not getting what we deserve. Nobody who walks this earth is. Instead, we're getting something far greater. His grace.

So, Is God Fair?

So, when I look again at Linda, my mother-in-law, I can't say that God has been "fair" in our sense of the word. But, in her life, He has been right. And she doesn't blame God for her husband's unfaithfulness and the other trials she's had to endure. Instead, she praises God for walking with her through those dark valleys and giving the grace to soldier on.

Sadly, many Christians in America, walk around feeling as though they've been cheated. They ask questions like, "Why can't I be healthy like others?" or "Why

does God allow him or her to be married?” or “Why couldn’t have I been born into a wealthy family?”

Unfortunately, the church itself has become an unwitting accomplice in this unbiblical thought process. We’ve tried to market Christianity as the better alternative, where life will be more successful. This may be true, but we must realize that Christianity is not about benefiting and taking and getting more of what we want out of a cosmic, vending-machine God. It’s about worshipping a God who has given us far more grace than we deserve. It’s about following the example of Jesus in sacrificing for the good of others.

We should view everything we’ve got in life as a gift from God, not complain when things don’t go our way.

Because thankfully, we don’t have a God who is fair, but a Heavenly Father who is always right.

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DIALECT MINISTRY’S FIRSTS.....

11 May 2008 is an important date for the Dialect Ministry. It is the first time that JCC went solo without help from YCC. It marks the first baptism in the Dialect service. It is also the first time that the Youths sang songs in dialect on this Mother’s day celebration.



WHAT'S IN A TITLE?

(Domestic Mgr, Administrator, Snr Engineer, Waste Disposal Specialist, Apostle, Prophet ...)

A Straits Times reader last year (12th May 2007) took umbrage with the term “housewife” to describe wives who stay at home. She urges the use of the term “Domestic Manager” instead, as a tribute to mothers. She compared the word “housewife” to another word “scarecrow” (“to scare the crow”) to put across her case to give mothers a better self-identity by the proper coinage of words.

I remember that once upon a time, one with a good Higher School Certificate, equivalent of today’s G.C.E. ‘A’ Level, would be proud landing a job as a clerk. Today, if you were appointed as a clerk, you would probably not stay long before job-hopping to a better career as a secretary or office administrator – even a “junior” or “assistant” secretary is “more respectable” than a clerk with the same job responsibilities; unless you are a clerk of a different kind, such as a law clerk (with 1st Class Honours) assisting a High Court judge in researching legal issues.

What is in a title? Plenty (of confusion and esteem value)!

It is no longer sufficient to use a simple noun by itself to express a person’s job. For example, if someone is a secretary, it is necessary to have an additional adjective to go with the job designation for the sake of clarity – ‘company’, ‘private’, ‘confidential’, ‘parliamentary’, etc. Similarly, an administrator may well be a superb old-fashioned secretary (earning a good pay) ably assisting his/her boss instead of being a civil servant in the Government Administrative Service. So, an appropriate qualifying adjective to go with the title ‘administrator’ is also justified to avoid misunderstanding. There are persons employed as technicians with good polytechnic-diploma qualifications; they discharge their functions proficiently. There are also “senior engineers” with the same diploma-level qualifications; unfortunately, their title gives rise to inflated expectations on performance and they end up with low customer-satisfaction scores.

Reality is that societies are unreal. A plain dish without proper garnishing with spice and condiment would make the taste buds pitiably; an unadorned description of what one really is would make self-esteem unpalatable. In this connection, I would propose the title CWDS (Community Waste Disposal Specialist), GRO (Garbage Removal Officer) or WEC (Waste Elimination Consultant) for the hardworking and indispensable health workers in charge of clearing our daily garbage (a.k.a. “garbage collectors”). My reason for the title choices is two-fold – firstly, Singaporeans just love short-forms or acronyms; secondly, we are all also quite habituated with words like “specialist” and “consultant” that they are quite easy to roll off the tongue.

The unreality of societies also seeps into the church

Old, well-used titles of office that are familiar to everyone are passé, so newer titles are coined for their chic factor – two in particular capture my imagination; viz., ‘Apostle’ and ‘Prophet’.

What truly is an apostle?

Let’s look at the following definitions:

- God’s messenger, one of the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus
- A missionary of the early Church
- One of the 12 administrators in the Mormon Church
- One who pioneers an important reform movement, cause or belief (not necessarily religious)
- “A Christian leader gifted, taught, commissioned, and sent by God with the authority to establish the foundational government of the church within an assigned sphere of ministry by hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches and by setting things in order accordingly for the growth and maturity of the church.” – A long definition by ICA, the International Coalition of

The title of apostle was conferred not by men, but by Jesus. Hence, the significance of the title.

Apostles, a body which accredits modern-day apostles.
<http://www.apostlesnet.net/index.asp>

Which of the above definitions is the most long-standing of them all? (No prize for getting it right.) As the word takes on new meanings with time, and different groups adopt different definitions, it naturally becomes more difficult for us to grasp the real office of the modern person behind the title. On the other hand, if everyone sticks to one single definition of it, faithful to its adoption in the Synoptic Gospels to refer to the original chosen 12 (Matt. 10:2, Mk 3:14, Lk 6:13), there would be no misapprehension about what office you are referring to by this word “apostle” that you use. The 12 apostles in the Bible did not give themselves the honorable title. The title of apostle was conferred not by men, but by Jesus. Hence, the significance of the title. This significance is now lost in the ways modern men ascribe to fellow men the office of apostleship with varying undertones of importance according to the group they belong to. Therefore, an apostle of the Latter-Day Saints is not regarded with similar distinction as another apostle of a Pentecostal church, the degree of distinction depending on the affiliation of the beholder. Certainly, neither of them can claim to hold the same distinction as the Apostles our Lord Jesus Christ personally designated.

Some people would argue that the title “Apostle” needs not be the privilege of the Lord’s chosen 12. After all, the word “apostle” in Greek means someone who is sent on a mission. So the Quorum of the Twelve (or simply “The Twelve” of the Mormon Church) is entitled to wear the same label as The Twelve in the Gospels since they (the Mormon leaders) are “sent on a mission” too. Likewise, the apostles accredited by ICA. Likewise, I should be at liberty, as indication of respect, call any person sent on a mission an apostle. Hear my argument:

When we are sent, representing the church on a mission, we are all missionaries. Right? No? Unfortunately, the word “missionary” is too bland, lacking in the oomph factor and drawing power. Instead of calling our

Instead of calling our faithful sister-in-Christ Rosanna (BLC’s missionary to Thailand) a missionary, we can call her an apostle (perhaps spelt with just a lowercase ‘a’).

faithful sister-in-Christ Rosanna (BLC’s missionary to Thailand) a missionary, we can call her an apostle (perhaps spelt with just a lowercase ‘a’). An uplift in title may draw more applicants for the thankless duties in the mission field where labourers are perennially short. Knowing Rosanna as an unpretentious servant of God, she will surely read this “bold suggestion” of mine as a joke, as it should be. If I were serious about it, she could well disdain me for putting a slur on her respectable calling by colouring her humble office with gratuitous airs for her embarrassment. As I learnt from a pastor, none of the Church Fathers after the apostolic period (Policarp, Ignatius, Augustine, Jerome, Justin, Luther, Calvin, John Wesley, etc.) would lift the title of “apostle” on themselves.

Maybe it is ok for me (the less-than-humble sort of person) to call myself a temporary apostle when I go (as sent by JCC) on a short mission to Cambodia. Maybe that is not good enough to lift my esteem – why, I can be a prophet (spelt with a lowercase ‘p’) too! Don’t misunderstand me – I am not talking about being a prophet the way the title is employed in the Old Testament for those who were sent by God to make prophecies. Neither am I talking about being like some of the modern-day prophets who prophesy well but only occasionally would they fail to predict events correctly. I am talking about being a prophet the way I would define it for myself. You know, from time to time, I do dabble with predicting events – like whether it will rain tomorrow notwithstanding the weather forecast to the contrary, whether the LCCS Family Day cum Walkathon would hit the fundraising target when signs are hazy, etc. I am proud (yes, proud) to announce that at least 50% of my past predictions were right. Ha..ha.. that is a pass mark – so I do qualify to accord **myself** (note the emphasis) the title of ‘prophet’ in a very very liberal sense. ☺

I can be a prophet (spelt with a lowercase ‘p’) too! ... I am talking about being a prophet the way I would define it for myself.

What truly is a prophet?

Let’s switch from liberal to strict interpretation. According to a website¹:

¹ <http://home.surewest.net/dfrench/evidence/prophecy.htm>

“Prophets, to be legitimate, must stand the test of time. If the prophet was not completely correct 100% of the time he is a false prophet. Prophecy, to be valid, must predate the event; must be precise enough so as not to be vague; must have enough events described to be beyond human ability to calculate or manipulate; in other words not to be something that man could do, without God’s guidance.”

The website further states, “Scholars suggest that there are about 1,000 prophecies altogether in the Bible --- some 800 in the Old Testament and about 200 in the New Testament. It must be noted carefully that the gift of prophecy --- clearly operative during those by-gone ages where the Biblical documents were being prepared and validated as God’s Word --- was terminated near the end of the first century AD, when the New Testament was completed (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).”

“There are many religions today that claim to have ‘prophets’, but remember for a prophet to be from God there can be no errors, ever! That lets all of the ‘prophets’ since the first century out.”

False apostles and prophets

False apostles and prophets (according to the original definitions and importance of the true titles) do not just spring up in modern times. They existed in the days of the bona fide apostles and prophets. You can read about false apostles in 2 Cor. 11:13 and Rev. 2:2; and about false prophets in Jeremiah 29:21-22 and Eze. 13.

If a scarecrow is something to scare the crow, the word is an accurate description of the object. There is no misunderstanding. Similarly, there is nothing wrong with the term “housewife” if it is commonly understood to refer to a wife who is a mistress of the house, worthy of respect for her chosen domestic management role. Why is there a need to change for the sake of pompousness? To change the title to “domestic manager” may raise more questions and more justifications for further variations to differentiate a *hdm* (housewife domestic manager) from a *sdm* (servant

domestic manager currently known as ‘maid’); or a *dmm* (domestic-manager mother) from a *dmwc* (domestic manager without child) so that the latter would not be embarrassed by someone paying a mistaken tribute on Mothers’ Day. Of course, further fine-tuning of the titles is par for the course based on feedbacks to save misperceptions. Think of what it would do to the prestige of a common private tutor, or rather to his discomfiture, if he were to be called “an academic consultant” and someone approaches him with high expectations (of quick miracles, perhaps) beyond what he is able to meet. In your shopping trips, do you come across sales consultants who do not know enough of their products, or advisers of all kinds who give you all kinds of advice other than the right ones?

Present-day “apostles” and “prophets” not to be misunderstood

So much ado about titles! Present-day apostles and prophets are not to be misunderstood in the context of the modern definitions of the titles and the commensurate contemporary roles ascribed to the title-holders. In the right context, they deserve the appropriate level of respect for their devotion to Kingdom’s work, unless they preach false doctrines. However, if men come today proclaiming loudly their appearance as the ones called as apostles, God’s chosen messengers, equal with The Appointed Twelve (Mk 3:14) in the things they boast about, then the ground has to be cut from under them. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. (2 Cor. 11:12-13).

Likewise, if men come tomorrow proclaiming themselves as prophets of God; yet, they prophesy out of their own imagination; we ought to say to them, “Hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!” (Eze. 13:2-3) Whatever one’s title as God’s humble servant, the work of the Holy Spirit will be on him and through him to draw glory to Christ, not to the servant or his ministry. (John 16:14) How personally important is a superlative title to God’s servants for mission fulfillment?



Happy Mothers' Day!

All female human parents, bearing long-sufferingly the important role of motherhood, deserve a hearty wish for a **Happy Mothers' Day** this second Sunday of May. "Mother" is a straightforward, down-to-earth, time-honoured title of endearment (not merely a title of address) that invokes recognition of her selfless love and sacrifice. Just keep it as it is. There is no necessity for anyone to propose a "clearer and better" title for the sake of modernity to replace that which is traditional and plainly understandable.

John Lee

Errata (definition: *An error in printing or writing*)



However, I do hope that he will be blessed with good health to live such a long life as I have reported.

Martin Cheah

In last month's issue of The Vine, I reported that Seline's dad was 80 years old. Seline has since informed me that he is only 68 years old.

Blame it on my poor command of the dialects which mislead me into the wrong assumption.



WHEN ALL ELSE ARE AGAINST US, BE FAITHFUL!

Revelation 2:8-11 reveals a church under duress – the church of Smyrna. Henry’s concise commentary on this passage remarks that “many who are rich as to this world, are poor as to the next; and some who are poor outwardly, are inwardly rich; rich in faith, in good works, rich in privileges, rich in gifts, rich in hope. Where there is spiritual plenty, outward poverty may be well borne; and when God’s people are made poor as to this life, for the sake of Christ and a good conscience, he makes all up to them in spiritual riches.”

Persecutions of Christians do happen around the world – far away from us as well as near to us geographically. Indeed, not far away, the father of one of my seminary classmates was shot dead when he shared the gospel in a hostile environment. Here are some other heart-wrenching news:

“Twenty-six Catholic priests, religious, and lay catechists were killed while serving the Church in the year 2005, according to year-end statistics furnished by the Congregation for Evangelization.” (30 December 2005, Rome CWNews.com).

Gunmen shot dead a 65-year-old Italian nun and her bodyguard at a hospital in Somali capital, Mogadishu. (BBC News 18 September 2006).

The villages of Sepe and Silanca in Indonesia were burned to the ground. Reports from several sources confirmed that attacks on the Christian villages started on the evening of 12 August 2002, after units of the armed forces which had been guarding the villages were unexpectedly withdrawn (Compass Direct - 17 August 2002).

Forms of persecution may vary according to circumstances. However, regardless of what form persecution takes, what ought to be our faith response? Revelation 2:8-11 speaks the message for us: **When all else are against us, be faithful!**

What were the odds against the Smyrna church?

- They faced tribulations and poverty. (v 2:9) Their

tribulations were due to their refusal to take part in ceremonies connected with emperor worship.

- They faced slander. (v 2:9) The local Jewish community collaborated with local Roman officials to repress the Christian minority for not participating in ceremonies connected with emperor worship.
- They faced prison. (v 2:10) Soon the Roman authorities would begin imprisoning people for just being Christians.
- They faced death. (v 2:10) The persecution from the Roman authorities was going to be severe. They had to be prepared to face death for heeding the advice “to be faithful, even to the point of death”.

With the terrible odds against them, including facing prison and death, the Smyrna church maintained a positive testimony. The Lord knew their work (v 2:9) and had no rebuke for them. The Lord praised them that despite their afflictions and poverty, they were rich (v 2:9). The following helped:

- Christ's example: Christ is the resurrected Lord (v 2:8). His resurrection was the promise and hope to the Smyrna church. Jesus used his own life as an example to encourage Smyrna church to be faithful even to the point of death.
- Christ's encouragement: Do not fear (v 2:10). These words remind them that their lives and ultimate destinies are in the hands of Christ. As Jesus teaches in Matthew 10:28-31, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. We should not exchange things of eternal value with those of no eternal value. Furthermore, our Lord Christ will limit the extent of suffering (2:10).
- Christ's command: Be faithful (v 2:10). Christ commands

the Smyrna church to overcome the impending persecution by drawing from the strength that he alone can supply.

- Christ's reward: The crown of life (v 2:10). To the faithful who do not flinch, Christ promises to give them “the crown of life” (2:10), the joy and final victory of life. They will not be hurt by the second death (2:11), the final and complete separation from God. They will be with Christ in the kingdom of God. Ultimately, this is what matters.

We believers in Singapore are blessed that we do not face life-threatening persecutions from governing authorities as the Smyrna church did. Nonetheless, the demand of faithfulness to the end is the same for us all today as it was for Christians in the past. Faithfulness can be severely tested when our ministry becomes encumbered by uncooperative fellow workers, when because of our faith we are rejected by loved ones and become the most unpopular in our family, or we are weighed down by disillusionment when our outreach work does not produce the desired outcome.

Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna, a disciple of the apostle John. When he was an old man, a persecution broke out. He was betrayed and captured. The officer did not intend to kill him and tried to persuade him, “Just say ‘Caesar is my Lord’ and offer a sacrifice to him and you will be able to live. In doing so, it will cost you nothing.” Polycarp was unmoved. In his heart, only Jesus was his Lord. When given the last chance by the judge to recant his faith, Polycarp said, “Forty-six years have I served the Lord, and He never wronged me, how then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?” Those Christians on the scene must recall the command given to them by their Lord: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Let us take heed of the Lord's words to the Smyrna church and emulate Smyrna church in our walk with Christ. **When all else are against us, be faithful!**

Amen.

Oh Ah Leng

Talk on HIV/AIDS Patients by Pax Tan

Rev Pax Tan is a pastor of a Lutheran church in Malaysia and he was involved in the rehabilitation of drug addicts since the 1980s. He was one of the workshop speakers when he came to speak about the marginalised AIDS patients. He knows something about HIV/AIDS because many drug addicts were infected by HIV/AIDS since they share needles to inject drugs and HIV contaminated needles shared from one drug addict who is infected caused another drug addict to have the HIV as well.

1. Prepare to engage the issue of HIV/AIDS.

Pastor Pax Tan said many in the churches even today, after HIV is around for more than a decade are still reticent to talk about AIDS. The "conspiracy of silence" will not serve the good of the church because ultimately the numbers infected by HIV/AIDS is growing in Malaysia and also in Singapore as well as around the world. It will not do to just ignore the problem, thinking that it will go away.

Churches in Singapore had focused on evangelism and they brought a lot of people to Christ. This is good, but this meant that the populations among Christians are always changing. Some of those who converted repented from a promiscuous life-style years ago but they had not known that they are having AIDS because HIV can be dormant and undetected until almost ten years later. When they suddenly discover they were infected in their past, and news reach the church, the church that is not prepared to engage with this issue might react out of fear and prejudice and in their behaviour shun or by their words judge the Christian harshly. This caused a lot of hurt and the church can become most unloving in their response.

He said in his own experience, he did not know about HIV/AIDS until it hits the drug addicts that are in his care. Many of them came down with HIV/AIDS and asked for help, and since they are needy Pastor Pax Tan cannot turn a blind eye to them. But he did not know how to help people with AIDS and they did not know what it is all about. Therefore he turned to the homosexuals in Malaysia to learn from them. At that point in time, this group of Malaysians was very seriously affected by AIDS and many were dying yet they want the world to know this disease and were glad to teach Pastor Pax Tan.

Pastor Pax Tan said that by now most people should know that AIDS is spread not like the flu, but through sexual intercourse and contaminated blood. Therefore it is easily preventable. One should not fear touching AIDS patients neither should one worry about being around them as it is a disease that is spread through sexual contact and blood transfusion alone. However because of unfaithful spouses, AIDS is spreading very fast through many marriages and even pregnant women unconsciously gave it to their infants. Children infected with AIDS are among the growing figures of AIDS infection worldwide.

2. HIV/AIDS the modern scourge of leprosy

HIV/AIDS is incurable at this moment, but medicines had been produced to slow down the rate of infection and control the disease. Therefore if someone can afford the medications, and follow a strict regime of medication, they are capable of living as long as anybody. However that being said, different strains of HIV/AIDS viruses are mutating very quickly and they can become immune to the current medications.

So, if HIV/AIDS will not kill those who can get the medicine for treatment to prolong their life, then what is the problem? The whole issue of AIDS is actually the stigma attached to those who are infected. They are scorned and often abused by their family members and even the wider society. AIDS had become the modern scourge of leprosy because it is a disease that brings severe social consequences. Due to prejudice and ignorance, many AIDS patients are not given the help in time in many parts of the world and they died due to a lack of medical treatment given to them and many a times they were neglected and shunned by their own friends and relatives and left to die. In Singapore, a lack of medical treatment is usually not the problem, rather it is the loneliness of those who are afflicted with HIV/AIDS because they are ostracized and many suffer in secret and silence so as not to let people know they have HIV/AIDS.

Similar to leprosy patients in the 20th century, they were shunned by their community and left alone. First century Palestinian culture also shuns leprosy patients and worse still their disease is associated with sin. In this it is very similar to HIV/AIDS patients. When someone is not infected through promiscuous behaviour, e.g. A faithful spouse received it from an unfaithful spouse, there is still little understanding and acceptance and help offered. AIDS patients no matter how they receive the virus are still

created in the image of God and worthy of our help. As Christians we need to know who our master is, Jesus our Lord for he touched lepers and helped them.

3. Know Your Jesus

The problem with Christians is that they don't know well enough who Jesus is. Some passages from scriptures show the attitude of Jesus towards lepers and that is instructive to the church about how we should respond to HIV/AIDS patients today.

A man with leprosy ⁿ came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." 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. (Mark 1:40-42)

The religious leaders of Jesus' day do not touch those who are unclean. They are considered sinful and even the sweat from their bodies can contaminate another person. The fact is that lepers are known as sinners and whoever touches them will be sinful as well. Religious leaders cannot afford to be sinful because once they are contaminated they cannot perform the religious duties which is required of them. Jesus however did not respond to a leper in the same way. He reached out to touch them, although he need not touch anyone and yet can heal them, yet he *choose* to touch so as to show solidarity and compassion to someone who had not been touched for a very long time.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ⁿ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture **is fulfilled in your hearing.**" (Luke 4:18-21)*

In this passage Jesus declared to his hometown people what his mission is all about. Therefore we who call Jesus our Master and Lord should identify with his mission and keep on doing what he was sent to do.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and `sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: `I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' ⁿ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." **(Matthew 9:9-13)**

Jesus is attracted to those who are marginalised. Those who are branded "sinners" were not accepted by the wider society and even religious leaders of Jesus' day questioned him for not behaving like a rabbi (teacher of the scriptures) but Jesus insist on having meals with them, spending time with them and giving them his attention. In fact, contrary to all our beliefs about Jesus, that he is here to affirm the righteous, he instead affirmed those who are called "sinners" and asked them to have a relationship with him.

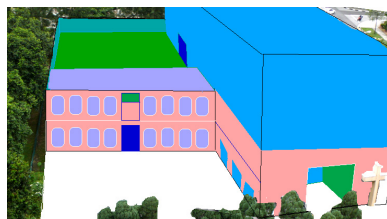
Today, many in the church continue to treat the HIV/AIDS patients as pariahs determined to keep far away from them so as not to be tainted by them. In fact this is more like the conduct of Pharisees in the bible than of Jesus. HIV/AIDS is going to increase as long as we have open borders, sexual promiscuity, ignorance about safer sex (there is no such thing as safe sex) practices. The church should not be blind to the needs of those who are affected and must follow their Master's leadership in this matter.

Reported by Samuel Wang

What would JCC look like with a \$7 Million facelift?



Care to share your vision of a new Lake District church building with us?



世上只有爸妈好

The Worth of Mothers and Fathers

Mother's Day was the reason for the Sunday Times to do a survey on the worth of mothers – measured in dollars without cents sense. Out of the survey came the monthly figures of \$23000 and \$8000 (as calculated by two HR practitioners) as the possible worth of a stay-at-home mum.

Not surprisingly, the survey results amused all mothers. Nevertheless, taking an extended flight of imagination over the price of a mother's job, we may ponder deeper and derive some meaning out of it.

Firstly, whatever the monetary value of a mother's worth, the figure cannot be one-size-fits-all. Assuming market rates and compensation principles, a mother of one child cannot be compared to a mother of three in the workload borne. There is no mention in the newspaper report whether the rates are fixed or vary according to the amount of work. However, by any yardstick of the commercial market, it is common sense that price should vary with workload. Hence, a full-time mother of two or more children would possibly be worth much more than one with a single child for her maternal roles, even if some “discounts based on work volume” were to be worked into the compensation according to the usual market practice of pricing concession. Further taking into consideration differing capabilities, measured by the outcomes (i.e., the well-being of the children raised up), the remuneration payable must be different for different mums. By the way, mothers contemplated as units of labour in the “homes sector” of the HR market and the labour in other sectors are like chalk and cheese – poles apart, because mothers as human resource cannot be hired and fired at will. 😊

Secondly, this question has to be asked: “Who is supposed to be bearing the mother's remuneration? It seems like a no-brainer answer that the husband (a.k.a. the children's father) is the natural paymaster (or boss). Does any mother like the thought that “he who pays the piper calls the tune”? 😊

This begs the next question: How many a man with his multiple roles as husband, father, “boss” and breadwinner can afford in raw money terms

the so-called market-level compensation for the woman whom he “appoints” to provide the services to his children?

If a man cannot afford the compensation, he has a few options:

- Appoint the children’s caregiver (i.e., mother) on a part-time basis (i.e., the mother is not stay-at-home for at least 10 hours in a day) and during the time she is not with the children, the father can engage a lower-cost foreign labour to stand in. Would it be any wonder if more and more women become absent (stay-out-of-home) mums because the “boss” cannot afford her compensation to look after the kids?
- Ask the children’s other parent (i.e., his wife) to share half the cost in addition to paying him some remuneration also (to further offset some of his share of the cost) for the jobs that he does as father to the children.
- Do not have children, stop at one or do not get married – to cut the mothering cost; or, in market parlance, reduce demand.

Don’t buy any of the above hogwash ideas! I know that the Sunday Times’ attempt at coming out with a “market price” for a mother’s job is a light-hearted exercise to give some allusion to the value of mothers and not meant to demean her value by reducing her priceless roles to a measure in **dollars-with-no-sense**. A mother’s roles are rendered in love so much so that any mercenary provider of similar services with commercial calculations cannot equal in quality (in breadth and depth). This is another explanation why a mother’s worth is definitely much more than any figure that the HR market can throw up. It is well recognised that a mother’s worth is measureless; fanciful money figures to pay tribute to her on Mother’s Day is inadequate.

After the amusement, we have our mind focussed on the true inestimable value of our mothers. Even fathers (with their own mothers to be grateful for) have to agree that no matter how much money they have, the money cannot buy a mother who is beyond price.

There cannot be a mother in a family if there is no father. So as we paid our tribute to mothers on Mother’s Day (this month), let us be fair to pay an equal tribute to fathers on Father’s Day (next month). The youths sang very well the Chinese song “世上只有妈妈好” at the dialect service on Mother’s Day. Should we ask them for an encore on Father’s Day but with



a switch of words to “世上只有爸爸好”? Strictly speaking, it would more properly reflect the equal worth of fathers and mothers in their complementary home-building roles if the song were to be titled

“世上只有爸妈好。”

Rationally, how can one ever accept the bias that in homes around the world, only a mother or a father is good (“只有妈妈好” or “只有爸爸好”), implying that the other is not good? Therefore, as we pay our tribute to fathers on Father’s Day, let us not forget the mothers too – for the fathers cannot be if there were no mothers to jointly bring the children into the home.

or a father is good (“只有妈妈好” or “只有爸爸好”),



John Lee

The 51st Coy Girls’ Brigade is having a sale-of-handcraft project. The



handcraft in question is hand-painted canvas shoes. Please support them.

