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**The Vine Committee****Editors:**

Martin Cheah

[mart5003@yahoo.com](mailto:mart5003@yahoo.com)

John Lee

[jpbislee@gmail.com](mailto:jpbislee@gmail.com)**Printer:**

Nick Wong

[digi\\_ics@yahoo.com](mailto:digi_ics@yahoo.com)**Writers:**

James Candiah

Andryl Leong

Tony Koh

Joyce Tan

**Photographers:**

Edwin Yeo

Ivan Tan



In the last issue of The Vine, I asked why are there so many poor? In an advertisement in the Sunday Times on 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2012 (pg 4), there was a quote by Bill Gates: "If you are born poor it is not your fault, but if you die poor, it is your fault."

In Deutonomy 15:4-6, "*However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. For the LORD your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.*" , I was surprised to find that there are not supposed to be any poor in Israel. So if any became poor, it is their fault because they did not fully obey the Lord. However when you realize that the most righteous man in the world (Jesus) did not live a life of wealth and comfort, it does not equate. In fact, Psalm 73 states, "*This is what the wicked are like -- always carefree, they increase in wealth.*" It didn't make sense to the psalmist and I guess I would not be able to make sense of it too, "*When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me....*" (Psalm 73:16)

So how does one become poor? Sometimes, it is our own fault, according to Proverbs 10:4 – "*Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.*" But the world tells you to "*Work Smart, Not Work Hard*", so sometimes it is due to others, we can be tricked into poverty, "*A poor man's field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away.*" (Proverbs 13:23)

If you find yourself poor, are you being punished for some thing? That was what Job's friends thought. Job was blameless, upright and God-fearing, yet he suffered greatly. We will just have to trust God in our suffering and

like Job say, “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.” (Job 42:2)

What can Christians do? “Let us not be satisfied with just giving money. Money is not enough, money can be got, but they need your hearts to love them. So, spread your love everywhere you go.” (Mother Teresa)

*Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.* Ecc 5:10

*Martin Cheah*

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There were 255 balls in box A, Band C altogether. Thirty-six balls were transferred from A to B, and 19 balls were transferred from B. to C. As a result, the number of balls in each box is the same.

How many balls were in box B at first?

**Solution**

Step 1: Transfer 36 balls from A to B.

Step 2: Transfer 19 balls from B to C.

Finally, each box contains  $255 \div 3 = 85$  balls.

Working backwards:

Referring to step 2, transfer 19 balls back from C to B,

C is left with  $85 - 19 = 66$  balls

B now has  $85 + 19 = 104$  balls

Referring to step 1, transfer 36 balls back from B to A,

B is left with  $104 - 36 = 68$  balls

There were 68 balls in box B at first.

$$\boxed{A} \quad \boxed{B} \quad \boxed{C} = 255 \text{ balls}$$

$$255 / 3 = 85 \text{ balls in each box}$$



**B** Has 85 balls now but it did not have 36 in the beginning       $85 - 36 = 49$  balls

**B** Has 49 balls and had given to C 19 balls earlier on       $49 + 19 = 68$  balls at first

**TOUGH  
QUESTIONS**

Did you read an article in the newspapers which stated that parents are sending their children to psychiatrists because of the tough maths questions? Did you try those primary school maths questions yourselves?

Here is one question of Primary 4 standard. I got bro John Lee to solve the problem. Looks simple once you have the answers.

Life is full of tough questions also, like: “How do I get to Heaven?” Well, it is quite simple once you know the answer.

*Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6*

## **THE CEO IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT**

Says who, that the CEO is not always right? Well, it is none other than Richard Branson who says so. He is the founder and CEO of the Virgin Group, a mega-corporation. In an opinion piece he wrote for the November 2011 issue of *SINGAPORE BUSINESS REVIEW*, he candidly revealed how in 2003 he went ahead to launch Virgin's own brand of the MP3 player against the strong advice of his management team that the financial analysis did not stack up. As CEO, he was not the expert on the details, but he overruled the wise demurrs from his capable advisers. As it turned out, the project bombed. There was no market chance at all, and so \$20 million of his investment went up in smoke.

People learn from mistakes. Richard Branson learnt. Are we not more fortunate to be able to learn from the mistake of others to pre-empt suffering the pain from our own. The CEO gives this sound advice, "It can be very hard to own up to your mistakes ... especially when it is a cause you alone have championed. This fear of embarrassment prevents many chairmen and bosses from doing their jobs properly and addressing the situation when it is most urgent. In this situation, honesty is the only policy. This is not the time to hold back information or pass the blame ... but you will not lose people's trust and respect by taking responsibility for the problem and admitting to your mistakes. People look for leaders to make informed decisions, not to be infallible."

Evidently, Branson is directing his advice at "chairmen", "bosses" and "leaders". To these, I may add "COOs", "managing directors", "company presidents" and many more. In corporate structure, there are many titles for the one who leads. No matter by what title you call the leader, he/she is the one who takes charge, who is the chief who executes policies and makes decisions – not alone at the top, but with the help of able assistants from the immediate management team down to the lower levels of co-labourers all of whom work with a common goal of success for the organization. So, in a sense, by whatever favourite title he/she is called, the leader is a CEO.

A CEO is the chief overseeing his sphere of responsibility. He/She can be a CEO of a giant conglomerate or that of a small business. In the sense of being a leader-in-command of his sphere, the chief executor of policies and rules, many of us are CEOs in our own rights by reason of our ownerships of our spheres of control. A teacher is chief officer in a classroom; so he/she is a CEO (even if just a small chief executive

executing classroom teaching policies) to whom the class committee of student leaders report. The captains of the Boys' and Girls' Brigades are CEOs who work with a management team of officers and with rank-and-file student leaders. Pastors and Bishops of the Church are CEOs within their specific circles of command.

By suggesting the idea that leaders are CEOs, I am not expecting them to have their heads swelled up with any idea of their importance and power to "pull rank" (borrowing the army lingo that carries a negative connotation of inappropriate exertion of authority). Rather, as CEOs, they recognize their heavy responsibilities, yet feel secure in the knowledge that they are not alone "at the top" but have the support of able lieutenants (management team) and co-labourers down the line in a collaborative relationship that is harmonious and productive. The spirit of Branson's message is as valid for reception by big chiefs as by small chiefs. Humble chiefs (regardless of command size) execute tasks with humility as humans, set the right example and are respected by their followers. In contrast, chiefs marked by a high-and-mighty attitude of being lord over all go about executing people (instead of executing policies), cutting off their lieutenants and thereby cutting off their own useful arms and legs. Supposedly, these chiefs don't make mistakes themselves. They are feared and therefore distanced, left alone to do according to what they think they know best – until events force a sharp turn and the realisation sets in as to how lonely it can be at the top, and how handicapped they become with arms and legs missing.

In the modern world, leaders are supposed to be progressive. When the world evolves, leadership attitude must also evolve. Nevertheless, old wisdom can also be better than new perceptions. John Ruskin (1819 – 1900) belonged to the Victorian era. You can see the vintage quality of his statement, "I believe that the first test of a truly great man is his humility. I don't mean by humility, doubt of his power. But really great men have a curious feeling that the greatness is not of them, but through them. And they see something divine in every other man and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful."

Saying that the CEO is not always right, and advocating corporate leaders to take note and act right for trust and respect, Branson is in fact advising on humility. Sitting on a high pedestal without appreciating the importance of the trusty legs can lead to a great fall. Thankfully, Branson himself managed to recover from the expensive folly of not listening to the legs,

and the lesson learnt made him more perspicacious as a capable CEO among capable lieutenants.

Do you consider the Prime Minister a big chief or a small chief? Recognizably, as the head of the Executive (in government) he is a CEO above all CEOs. Nobody would say that the PM, as principal CEO that other chief executives look up to is always right, not having made any mistakes big or small. Nobody says that he is always wrong, not having done anything great for the good of the nation he serves. “Not always right and not always wrong” is the way it is with all humans. Being aware or not being aware of this fact is a significant factor that differentiates leaders. Our PM humbly addressed the senior cadres of the PAP with the following thought-provoking words (at the Young PAP’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary rally in April last year):

“Never forget we are servants of the people, not their masters. Always maintain a sense of humility and service. Never lord it over the people we are looking after and serving. Be as strict with ourselves as we are with others, because that is the way for us to win respect and support.”

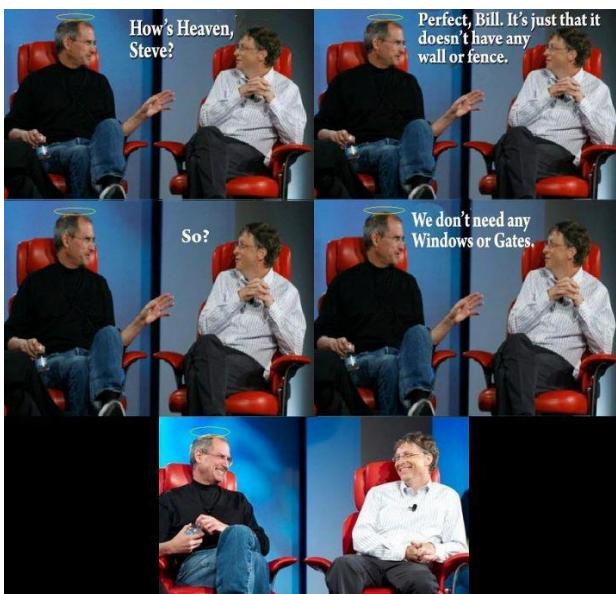
It is noteworthy that the concept of servant leadership was espoused by Jesus Christ. As our Lord, He came to serve rather than to be served. He washed his disciples’ feet to demonstrate the servanthood of leadership, saying to his disciples:

“Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (John 13:12-16)

Not long after the above instruction, a dispute arose among the disciples as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus reprised the lesson on the servanthood of leadership:

Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:25-27)

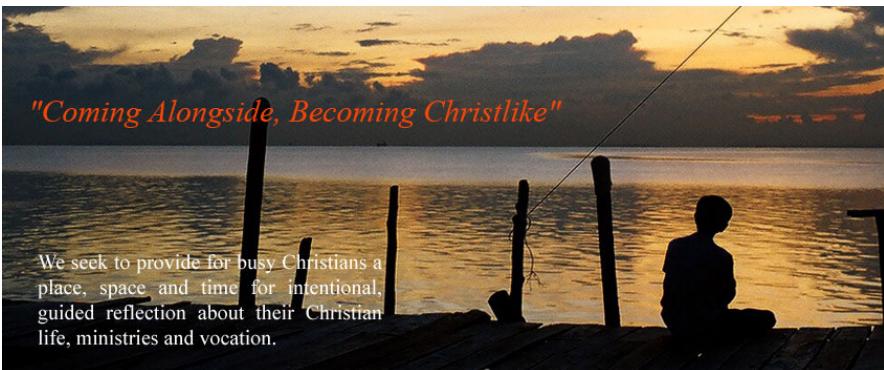
The disciples were primed to be CEOs in God's Kingdom, to be the chief executives in charge of executing the teachings of Christ within organizations (flocks) of sheep. These disciples were already making mistakes to be reproved by the Lord before they became full CEOs (Chief Evangelism Officeholders). After the Lord left them, they went on their duties. To be sure, they progressed along with mistakes, with full dose of humility as they were taught. As leaders, serving was an honour. They were not always right; they were not always wrong. All in all, they were more right than wrong because they had the strength of humility and exemplariness of strictness with themselves to win respect and support from those whom they serve.



### Problems

*The problem ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us.*

## WHAT I LEARNED FROM A RETREAT



"Coming Alongside, Becoming Christlike"  
We seek to provide for busy Christians a place, space and time for intentional, guided reflection about their Christian life, ministries and vocation.

Two years ago in Aug 2010, I was very stressed up and thus I went to attend a semi-silent retreat directed by Chong Ser Choon and held at Blue Mountain Kelong, Indonesia. There I just poured my stress out to God and meditated on His Word. I was just having a time of rest and drawing strength from God, without consciously expecting changes.

At last Christmas Dec 2011 as I reviewed my life in the whole year, I realized that God had been so good to me. He had quietly made changes to the situations that I had poured out to Him at the last retreat. I must have been too busy day to day to have noticed it earlier. I am very thankful for God's faithfulness, love and mercy upon me and my family. I want to set aside time to thank Him and worship Him for His goodness and love to me; thus, I again attended Ser Choon's Lenten semi-silent retreat this year from 3-5 February.

From Luke 1:8-15, I learn of three movements where our heart is. We tend to stop at the outer court and only focus on our needs or needs of others and do not enter into the holy place to commune with God and worship God for who He is – a loving Father, faithful, merciful and gracious God accepting us as His beloved children.

1. At the temple's outer court – people are praying, the heart is focused on self or peoples' needs.
2. Enter into the inner court, the holy place – enter into silence, outside noise is removed and the heart can now tune to God.
3. In the holy place – intruded by the angel of God, now the heart focus is forced to shift from self to God.

The retreat title: "Watching Jesus: Speech, Action, Reaction" Luke 9:18-27; 44-45, 51.

Who is Jesus to you?

We were meditating on Christ on Holy Saturday, the day after Christ died on Good Friday. The Bible records that there was darkness from the sixth hour to the ninth hour over the whole land on Good Friday.

Without Christ, there is darkness, sadness, no savior or redeemer, no hope of a new kingdom. When Christ was on earth with the disciples, He spoke many times that He would rise again on the 3rd day. He promised that he would never leave us or forsake us. Yet, the disciples did not remember or listen to His words. The disciples did not expect and did not believe that He would rise again. All His words were forgotten, all hope gone.

Similarly when reading the Bible, words just pass through and out. I came to the retreat wanting to thank and worship God but was directed to meditate on the Holy Saturday, the day Jesus left us. Through this meditation on darkness (absence of God), I began to treasure the joy of God's presence in my life.

Let me conclude with these words from a hymn, "Lord, You are beautiful beyond description, too marvelous for words, too wonderful for comprehension, Yes Lord, who can grasp your infinite wisdom, who can fathom the depth of your love..."

Holy God, thank you for  
your love.

God bless,  
*Lissa Low*

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JCC COMBINED CHURCH  
RETREAT 13 – 16 JUNE  
2012 @ BINTAN AGRO  
RESORT –

**SIGN UP NOW!**



## Gardenia Factory Tour & Visit to Punggol Waterway

22 Feb 2012

What has God to do with the bread we eat?

Our affable Deacon Peter Cheong asked the question and provided the answer in his easy-to-understand Hokkien that someone like me who is poor in the dialect could still grasp the kernel of his message:

“God provides the sunshine and the rain, without which the grains in the soil would not grow and we would not have the flour to bake the delicious breads.”



What a short-and-sweet message without high-falutin theology, easily digested by the attentive audience, including many elderly folks, who fully packed a 50-seater bus to visit the Gardenia Bread Factory at Pandan Loop!



After an informative introduction to the wide range of Gardenia products and watching a Mandarin video presentation on the bread-making process, the group proceeded to tour the factory on an elevated walkway to see how dough and bread passed along conveyor belts from one

production point to another, including a very tall and impressive cooling tower. We already had our lunch, but the aroma of freshly baked breads wafting into our nostrils stirred our appetites for the free bread tasting and take-home buns offered to every visitor. It was so kind of Gardenia Foods (S) Pte Ltd to welcome the large group from JCC Dialect Ministry.

It was raining from the time we left the church at about 2.30 p.m. to the time we left the Gardenia Factory at about 4 p.m. for our next destination –

### **THE PUNGOL WATERWAY.**

The journey from Pandan Loop to Punggol took us more than an hour, with some difficulty to find the location. However, when we reached, there was no rain but bright evening sunshine. A sheltered pavilion was just a few steps away from the alighting point. Over there, some of the elderly folks who were not very mobile with their walking sticks or wheelchairs chose to take their rest, have fellowship with one another and enjoy their warm dinner of rice with big chunks of juicy chicken. The more physically fit ones took their leisurely evening stroll under the comfy sun for about 10 minutes to an exercise park with a water fountain and washroom facilities.



The Punggol Waterway is a huge place with many attraction points, stretching through the entire Punggol Town. It was opened only in October last year. While our short evening visit would not enable us to enjoy the place to the fullest, we can at least make a small “boast” that we “have been there and done that” even if it was just

in a small way of taking in the beautiful sights and enjoying a good time of fellowship by the water and green grass. How fresh the air and how sweet the experience from which we can plan a fuller and more fulfilling return visit! We had travelled far from the West (Jurong) to the East (Punggol). Now we know the existence of the lovely My Punggol Waterway. “Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.” (Prov. 25:25)



John Lee

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JCC Dialect Ministry brought a bus load of seniors together with friends, family members and helpers to visit Gardenia Bread Factory and Punggol Waterway Garden.

Deacon Peter commenced the

Dialect Outing with a Prayer of Thanksgiving and Peggy outlined the day's program. GOD is GOOD and it is GOOD to have the Outing for our seniors.

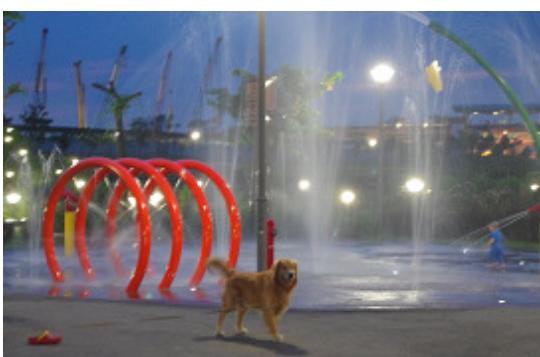
We were introduced to the varieties of bread produced by Gardenia and it



is quite a revelation to know that the factory churns out 8,000 packs of the favorite white bread per day.

Besides seeing the bread making process we also got to taste samples of the various breads and of course to shop for our daily bread.

Next stop was Punggol Waterway. It was quite a challenge to locate this new park and for Peggy the real challenge was to locate toilets for our seniors. It was a good idea to split the group to those who can take the long stroll to the toilets and those who had to wait for the return journey to have their pee break.



We Give Thanks for the good outing... Give Us this Day our Daily Bread...

Jesus said - I am the Bread of Life....

*Tony Koh*

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### **My Dad's Better Than Your Dad**

Three boys on the playground were bragging about their dads. One said. "My dad scribbles a few words, calls it a song and they pay him 50 bucks."

"Oh, yeah. My dad scribbles a few words, calls it a poem and they pay him 100 bucks."

"That's nothin'," said the third kid. My dad scribbles a few words, calls it a sermon and it takes six people to collect all the money!"

## ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE

Between 30 and 40 church members attended the Ash Wednesday Service held on 22 Feb 2012 from 8.00 p.m.

Although I was late because of unexpected delay in the journey back from Punggol (Dialect Ministry's outing), I am glad that I was still able to catch the spirit of the observance with the singing of hymns, a message from Rev. Anthony and with Pastor using ash to make the sign of a cross on the foreheads of believers as a sign of repentance for our sin.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. The week before Easter is called the Holy Week, which includes Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Each day of observance serves us its pertinent message. It is not Easter as an occasion by itself that is spiritually significant, but together with all the related events leading to it, with its beginning in our sin whereby the whole scheme of God's design unfolds in its time. The whole message that God has for our observance of Lent can best be fully appreciated from the start of the season (rather than the middle of it) to the end. A full understanding is certainly more spiritually rewarding than a halfway pick-up of God's message relating to Christ's Passion and resurrection. In the next issue of the Vine (March), I shall deal with the important meaning of Lent in more detail; here, I shall share my thoughts on the important Ash Wednesday.

Let's refer to some verses in the Bible:

- “Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.” (2 Sam 13:19)
- “When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. In every province ... there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.” (Es. 4:1, 3)
- “in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures ... that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and

petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.” (Da. 9: 2, 3)

- “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Mt. 11:21)

We cannot deny the fact that God frequently (as recorded throughout Scripture) uses imagery (signs and symbols) for purposes. From the verses quoted above, the ash as a sign of sorrow is evident. Christ’s Passion has its foundation in our sin, for which we ought to feel compunction to repent in realization of our indebtedness to Christ for His suffering as propitiation on our behalf.

In secular affairs that people consider essential for formalities and ceremonies, they do not dispense with the visible expressions even though they know very well to hold what dwells in the heart as more crucial in life. They know there is a good time to act upon their customs. As regards Ash Wednesday, it is not secular but Christian in precept. It is always on a Wednesday, 40 days<sup>1</sup> before Good Friday. The commencement of our journey in Lent is a good time to testify by our heart that connects with the visible expression by way of the Ash Wednesday observance. It is just like Christmas, Good Friday and Easter. The visible expressions by way of our observances do not replace the true emotion in our hearts; nevertheless, they do have their focal roles as pointers of spiritual directions.

In this issue of the Vine, I have also written on the topic “Different Dragons”. The fact that “dragons” are mentioned in Scripture as evil does not imply that the use of the word “dragon” is to be banned by association. Similarly, the fact that the word “Easter” does not appear in the Bible but has some etymological root in some other language in pagan history (as

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<sup>1</sup> Rain fell on the earth for 40 days and nights. (Gen. 7:12) Jesus was tempted in the desert for 40 days. He appeared to His disciples for 40 days after resurrection. (Acts 1:3)

some anti-Easter-celebration people claim) does not imply that the celebration of Easter ought to be avoided by truly faithful Christians. **To be sure, the actual origin of Ash Wednesday observance in the Church does not have any link to pagan practices.**

Ash Wednesday is a time for mourning and repentance for our sin, the reason for the Passion of Christ. However, God will console those who mourn in Zion and:

- give them beauty for ashes,
- the oil of joy for mourning,
- the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
- that they may be called trees of righteousness,
- the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

(Isa. 61:2 NKJV)

God will give those who mourn "bouquets of roses instead of ashes." (The Message)

There is substantial truth from the Isaiah verses, which have actually been adapted as a hymn of praise. **The Scripture tells us the temporariness of our mourning (sorrow), the transience of our spirit of heaviness (which we do feel regarding our sinfulness and troubles), and the righteousness that is conferred upon us not by our own virtues but by the planting of the Lord and for the purpose that He may be glorified!**

Yes, the mourning that begins with ASH WEDNESDAY is only temporary. It will be replaced by the sweetness of Christ's resurrection and our salvation!

Read more in March Vine about the significance of preparations for EASTER as:

- God prepared for it before the creation of the world.
- Jesus Christ prepared His disciples for it.

SHALOM!

*John Lee*

## **Different Dragons**

If you think that dragons are non-existent, think again. Recently, I learnt that a species of it can be found in the Singapore Zoo; it is called the bearded dragon. Banners hung on lampposts across Singapore during the Chinese New Year season showed a beautiful picture of the creature with the words: “Let the lóng [龙] celebrations begin!”

The zoo is being humorous to spice up the welcome to the Year of the Dragon with the idea that a lizard can be imagined as a dragon so long as it has the lóng [龙] in its name. People are further invited to visit the zoo to “walk among real dragons!”

Ok, so what are the real dragons and what are the fakes? It can't be that the zoo is actually referring us to the “real” Bearded Dragon worshipped as god in Mayan mythology. Obviously too, the chameleon with the 龙 in its Chinese name is not the real one, its colourful ability to masquerade notwithstanding. How about the Komodo dragon? I would agree with you that it is as much a dragon as a seahorse is a horse.

Real or myth, anything to do with the dragon is welcomed as auspicious by the Chinese in this lunar year. “Auspicious” means favorable, promising, positive, opportune, bringing any effect that is good. Unfortunately, auspiciousness in the Dragon Year is evidently not for everybody. As large numbers of couples strategize to give birth to dragon babies, the future will come when the sad reality bites that many in this young dragon generation struggle in competitions for best primary schools, popular secondary schools, elite junior colleges and sought-after places in universities. It seems that dragon kids will have to work very much harder to beat competition. It is not difficult to find stories of successful “dragons” as it is to find stories of failures. To all who are intense in their intent to pursue the dragon for good luck and fortune, there is the caveat that success is never guaranteed despite all the energies spent in the chase. Success is never determined by the single factor of date of birth.

To myth celebrants and fengshui believers among the Chinese, there are different types of dragons. This lunar year, it is the water dragon's reign. Wood dragon, metal dragon, fire dragon and earth dragon will have their turns to reign in future years. If anyone wishes to learn more about dragons, there are others still: Japanese dragon (wingless with clawed feet), Korean dragon (with different symbolism from Chinese dragon), Vietnamese dragon (from which the Vietnamese people came, according

to an ancient creation legend), Bhutanese (thunder dragon), Nepalese, Turkic, Western, European, English, etc.

Have you also heard of, Babylonian dragons with various names, Egyptian winged dragon, the dragons of India, of Arabia, etc.?

There are dragons and there are dragons, spanning the world's innumerable mythologies or folklores stretching from East to West. The above is not an exhaustive list. It seems that no ancient or modern people is entirely untouched by stories about dragons, whether these creatures are Western fire-breathing and malevolent to be feared, or Eastern charming and benevolent to be welcomed. In fact, etymologically, the word "dragon" was derived from Old French, which in turn derived from Latin, which in turn originated from the Greek word δράκων (drakon). Evidently, dragon stories occupy a significant presence in the human world all the way from ancient times – regardless of how one views the dragon, as just legend or as bearing real primal forces that have a great influence on lives. Noting the universal presence of the dragon in wide-ranging human perceptions, people cannot possibly escape notice of it. Christians also cannot ignore it, for it is imperative enough to be mentioned in the Bible. As Christians, we study God's Word and seek to understand what God wants to tell us. What God tells us in His Word is often different from what the world tells us. So it is, about dragons – what we learn from Scripture is definitely of a different category from those of legends and folklores. Do not be confused between them.

In the Book of Revelation 12, a fiery dragon with seven heads and ten horns is Satan-incarnate. This dragon is also referred to as a beast in Rev. 13:1. So "beast" and "dragon" are synonymous in the Revelation context of the end times. We are warned not to worship the beast:

"If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath." Rev. 14:9, 10

The dragon characterized in Scripture, as an evil beast, a devil-incarnate and a spiritual arch-enemy of God is not quite the same as the Chinese New Year dragon and its counterparts depicted in Asian legends; and the dragon welcomed at our lunar season is also greatly unlike the dragons in Western and European mythologies. In the long Chinese history, there are thousands of other myths and legends (e.g., 盘古开天Pangu opens the

sky; 女娲补天Nü Wa mends the sky; 嫦娥的故事fairy on the moon ; etc.) which we may listen to understandingly even if we do not subscribe to them. It is true that with the passage of time, generations and generations of modern Chinese no longer unthinkingly accept every story that is passed down from their ancestors. Yet, it is interesting to note that the Word in the Bible is still very much embraced by God's faithfuls. When the dragon/beast as described in Scripture comes, it will be preceded by five major events, and it will not have the slightest likeness to the depictions in the world's dragon mythologies.

The dragon is neither a creature to be worshipped nor an object for idolization.

If anybody wishes to watch the Bruce Lee's films "Enter the Dragon" and "Return of the Dragon", or the 1993 documentary "The Curse of the Dragon" (recently shown on one of StarHub's channels, about the mystery surrounding the martial art superstar's life and untimely death), he/she can go ahead. Christians do not unreasonably suggest that anything with a hint or mention of "dragon" becomes untouchable, to be kept at farthest distance. You do not worship or idolize the dragon, but you may still keep a lóng [龙] (such as the bearded dragon, a gentle lizard native to Australia) as a pet if it is permitted by law, or at least



view it at the Singapore Zoo.

*John Lee*

*Be like water making its way through cracks. Do not be assertive, but adjust to the object, and you shall find a way round or through it. If nothing within you stays rigid, outward things will disclose themselves.*

*Empty your mind, be formless. Shapeless, like water. If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle and it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow or it can crash. Be water my friend.*

## PANELED HOUSES

by Os Hillman

"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" - Haggai 1:4

There is a crisis of grand proportions in the spiritual house of God today. The moral fiber of our world has eroded. Greed, idolatry, and pleasure are the gods of our day. And it is no different in the Body of Christ.

The prophet Haggai wrote about a people who had lost concern for the need to build God's house because they were so focused on their own worldly needs. It is a dangerous place to get with God. When our world begins to focus around increasing our pleasure, building bigger and better homes, and failing to make what is important to God important in our own lives, this should be a warning to us.

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," He said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (Matthew. 21:12-13).

Jesus came into Jerusalem and found the workplace believers buying and selling in the temple. As far as they knew, this was an acceptable practice in their day. Their fathers did it, and now they were doing it. It was business as usual. Jesus got angry, turned over the tables, and said that His house was a house of prayer. He found the workplace believers of the day seeing His house as a place for profit, not prayer. They had stepped into a place of complacency that was not acceptable to the Lord. When we begin to blend in with the moral condition of an ungodly world, we begin losing God's perspective on life.

It is easy to begin blending in with our culture and to accept what is being modeled by the ungodly. Are we having an impact on our world? Or is our world having an impact on us?



## DYING YOUNG

Whitney Elizabeth Houston (August 9, 1963 – February 11, 2012). Her first solo performance in the church was "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah".

Davy Jones (December 30, 1945 – February 29, 2012). He became famous when he starred in the TV series, The Monkees.



Fame and wealth do not ensure a long life instead. "*Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding,... Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.*" (Proverbs 3:13,16)

## **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS**

Luke 9:23

Jesus said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"

*What does it mean to deny myself?*

Lord you said that you came to give me abundant life. How then do I live this abundant life and yet deny myself. What do I need to give up and lay at your feet? I must first know who I am, what I own or have that needed to be given up. Lord, whisper to me.

*What does taking my cross mean?*

The cross means suffering, pain, sadness, darkness, the low times of my life. Lord, how can I carry the cross daily? It will be too much to bear. I need joy, happiness not suffering. No Lord, I do not want suffering and darkness.

Then it dawns on me that it is the "I" that I am only thinking of, my self-centeredness. I was told the cross is just a line across the "I". It means to cancel the "I", to deny myself, no longer should I focus on the "I" but the "J" who had carried the cross for me. It goes well with the verse "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me". Jesus is whispering: "Beloved, let me carry your cross."

Once I realized that it is Jesus who is carrying the cross daily, life seems more bearable. I should let Him do so. The promise is that He will never leave me or forsake me. He lifted me up from darkness to light. What a joy then to have Him carry my cross daily and to follow Him.

I am reminded of the "footprints in the sand." In difficult times, you carried me. Thank You Jesus for your love and faithfulness.



*Lissa Low*

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY,  
Alice, Peter and Jenny

Dialect Ministry celebrates your birthdays....

# UNCLEAN HANDS

Last Sunday (26<sup>th</sup> Feb), Pastor Andrew preached on Mark 7:1-13 about "Unclean Hands". The bottom line is that "***you nullify the word of God by your tradition***" (Mark 7:13). However in this day and age, with an outbreak of HFMD (Hand, Foot, Mouth Disease), it is more than tradition which should drive us to keep clean hands, it is common sense.

So if your child refuses to wash his hands before meals referring to Mark 7:2, what are you to do? Is it possible that in those days, there are lesser germs, or less dirt than nowadays? Don't people get sick when they eat with dirty hands back then? Wouldn't the creator of the world know about germs even though the people of those days don't know about it?

I don't have a foolproof answer but I believe that the disciples' hands were not unclean in the physical sense but rather in the traditional sense because the Pharisees "*saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were 'unclean,' that is, unwashed.*" (Mark 7:2) The word **unclean** is in quotation marks indicating that they were clean but were not ceremonially washed.

That evening after Dialect service, some of us went to NUH to visit sis Dorothy Ow. She is under palliative care after stopping her treatment. We sang to her some dialect songs and Deacon Peter prayed for her. To our surprise, another patient diagonally opposite invited us to pray for her. We went over and found out that she was Cantonese speaking and so we had to switch to Cantonese songs. Deacon Peter could not pray in Cantonese so Joo See had to take over. Now I know why God had planned all these years to let her watch all those Cantonese serials on TV.

As we left Dorothy, we all used the hand sanitizer because we were going over to visit uncle PS George in the same hospital. Uncle George looked very weak, a shadow of his old self, and it brought tears to my eyes as we prayed for him. After we left, we all used the hand sanitizer again. We had to keep our hands clean as we were going home for dinner.

What about church dress codes? Recently, it was highlighted in My Paper about the dress code of the Church of St Anthony in Woodlands. Apparently the church wardens are tasked to hand out warning letters to those whose clothes do not conform to the church's dress code. Is this another case of traditions of man? Let me ruminate on this topic and write about it in the next issue of The Vine.

*Martin Cheah*