

The Vine Committee

Editors:

Martin Cheah
mart5003@yahoo.com
John Lee
jpbislee@gmail.com

Printer:

Nick Wong
digi_ics@yahoo.com

Writers this issue:

John Lee
Karen Soh
Martin Cheah

Photographers:

Martin Cheah



Andy Stanley gave this advice at a conference: ***"Don't work too hard on your weaknesses."***

He explained that he had the mistaken perception that great leaders took pains to identify every area of weakness—and then worked tirelessly to correct them. Instead, he said, he had come to the realization that leaders were better off concentrating on their strengths.

"My fully exploited strengths," he said "are a far greater value to our organization than my marginally improved weaknesses."

I read the above in an email. I realized that Mr Stanley is quite right. It is the tendency of modern management to work out the SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. However, if you were me, an introvert, you will focus all your attention on your Weaknesses and struggle to improve on them. I should refocus on my Strengths because what I am good at, I can improve much faster than what I am weak at. For instance, it would be better for me to improve my Malay language rather than to struggle with Mandarin. In my four years with the Dialect Ministry, I have managed to understand more Hokkien words but I am still far from being able to hold a conversation with our dear uncles and aunties. They only know me as Nikon D90 because that is what I block my face with.

What about JCC? For years we struggle with our smallness but could this be our strength? Could we improve on our 3S (Smile, Shake hands and Speak to newcomers) to make visitors feel the warmth of our small family church?

I am finishing a book by Philip Yancey called, "What's so Amazing about Grace?" He wrote the book because of a quotation he heard from a friend

who interviewed a prostitute. When asked why she doesn't go to church, the prostitute replied, "Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse."

Mr Yancey was intrigued that women much like this prostitute fled toward Jesus, not away from Him. The worse a person felt about herself, the more likely she saw Jesus as a refuge. Has the church lost that gift? Evidently the down-and-out, who flocked to Jesus no longer feel welcome among His followers.

In the book there are many examples of God's grace based on the parables, eg. the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep and the Servant who owed much to the Master. There are also many examples of ungrace, like the Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal, who could not forgive the Nazis for the holocaust. He also writes about forgiveness which breaks the cycle of blame and loosens the stranglehold of guilt.

He shares a story about a woman who could not forgive. When he asked her about what she thought of the parable of the Prodigal Son, she replied that this parable was third in a series of lost coin, lost sheep and lost son. Her conclusion was, "People have free will. They have to be morally responsible. That boy had to come crawling back on his knees. He had to repent. That was Jesus' point."

Mr Yancey disagreed. All three stories emphasize the finder's joy. When the son tried to repent, the father interrupts his prepared speech in order to get the celebrations under way.

In the news recently, we hear of residents who petition against having nursing homes near their flats. Some reasons given were loss of football field and blocking of ventilation and view. Are these the true reasons? Do we sometimes react like this when the poor come to church? They are a burden rather than a blessing. What did Jesus ask the apostles to do with the 5000 men? "*They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.*" Matthew 14:16.

So work on improving your strength. What is your strength? *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.* Psalm 28:7

Martin Cheah



In the April issue of The Vine, Martin Cheah shared his view about the movie “*Marvel’s The Avengers*”. It so happened that I watched the movie before he did. I agree with him that “it is not logical for super intelligent heroes to battle each other.” Although I had a free ticket, I left the cinema feeling that the ticket was wasted on the movie, which was not as exciting as hyped in advertisements, with not enough actions. This is just my humble opinion, in contrast with the news about its box office record smashing feat.



Nevertheless, as a consolation for the 140 min spent watching the movie, I visualized a worthwhile message to take back. (Thankfully, my productive brain was not parked away from the cinema hall.☺)The superheroes were supposed to be honorable protectors of Earth, but they fought among themselves while a devious enemy was preparing his move. “Divided we fall, united we stand” – This is a clear-cut truth. Thankfully, the superheroes realized in time their silliness. (Even superheroes can be silly.) They finally banded together to defeat the powerful evil enemy from beyond the world.



We are fighting a real invisible enemy in the spiritual realm. This enemy is not an accepted dweller in this world, but he is very powerful and seeks to devour us. Are we united as a spiritual brotherhood in Christ, or are we consumed by problems amongst us whereby we fight for personal triumphs against our own? Do we become drunk with conceit by the powers we have tasted as superheroes in some ways in our lives that won us praises of men? We need to “be of sober spirit, be on alert.” (1 Pet. 5:8) “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph. 6:12 KJV)



At the end of the movie, the furtive villain, with his army decimated, conceded, “Humans are not to be underestimated and to face them would be to court death itself.”



The movie did not go further to finalise the destruction of the villain. However, in our real battle, the final scene that plays out will be an eternal destruction of the Evil One, as the Book of Revelation says. Too bad that this Evil One does not have the wisdom of the furtive villain in the movie to concede the futility of his wickedness early!

Oh, my goodness, it looks like I am taking the movie a bit too seriously! Let's get back to what the movie is supposed to be – for entertainment, recreation and diversion from our daily grind. It is an action movie which, if it is your cup of tea, you may just sit back and watch while you “park your brains in the car” (to borrow a humorous expression from Martin Cheah) because you don't need a brainy workout to enjoy the silly screen actions. To those senior citizens who are scared of having to climb down 3 flights of stairs like Martin did after the movie, the solution is: “Avoid the cinema that is not elderly-friendly.”

A friendly note: If you do go and watch the movie, and later find that you agree with what I said above that the ticket is better for some other, I am not to be blamed. If you do not go, then you may wish to thank me for sacrificing my time to watch it and bring you this humble opinion piece to save your time and expense. ☺

John Lee

P.S.

Readers are encouraged to share light-hearted book reviews, movie reviews, whatever reviews. The Vine does not need to be filled with only heavy spiritual contents. You know, we are all humans who need occasional diversions into something light for the brain.

In the last issue of The Vine, Caleb share his experiences in Cambodia. Here are some pictures to tell the story more fully.



Happy Parents' Day; Happy Family Day!

Saddam Hussein called the Iraq war the mother of all battles. Alas, the battle left his country in abject defeat, and perished his sons' lives. It was never to be a glorious battle, or to bring glory to all mothers. Nevertheless, I am curious why he called it the mother of all battles and not the father of all battles.

Like it or not, the expression "mother of ..." became a red-hot choice for people to describe all things that are of great significance. The Greek philosopher, Plato, did coin the expression "necessity is the mother of invention." However, thanks or no thanks to Saddam Hussein, people everywhere started to use the expression "mother of ..." ad nauseum only after the Iraq war – "mother of all this" and "mother of all that". I can't help being drawn in by the fever; and so, as we celebrate Mothers' Day 2012 this month (May), shall we make it "the mother of all Mothers' Day"?

On the occasion of Mothers' Day, let's think positive in praise of our mothers. That the expression "mother of ..." has been used since the time of Plato (c. 400 – 300 BC) and even in the KJV Bible suggests the importance of mothers. In Gen. 3:20, "Adam called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all living." In Gal. 4:26, "Jerusalem ... is free, which is the mother of us all."

I am a father. Can a man understand a mother better than a woman or mother understand hers? Vivian Lai, a Mediacorp actress and mother of two girls, once said at an interview that after becoming a mother, she came to appreciate the years of love and care by her own mother much more acutely. I think the reason is obvious, and it can be said too that a man who becomes a father gets to feel a more intimate sense of the hardship of parenthood and thereby develop a deeper appreciation of his parents.

I can't speak for youngsters today, especially those who do not yet have the privilege of personally experiencing the joy and stress of being a parent, because the way they acquit themselves in relationship matters seems very much different from the way older folks like me did when young. I am not a mind reader, and so I do not know why some youngsters nowadays generally give the impression that they are not plainly expressive of their affection in tangible ways even if they love their parents in their hearts. Unfortunately, as we get to read occasionally in the news, there are children who are self-absorbed whereby they neglect their parents. However, I think this is a minority. Although children may be

reticent outwardly, there are occasions when bits and pieces of evidence of their love trickle out in visible signs of care and consideration. Still, like a boy loving a girl or vice versa, an open confession of the heart can sometimes have a very powerful effect to delight and reinforce bonds. For example, a candid statement like “I love you, mom” or “I love you dad” can be a sweet and powerful communication of feelings and a strong encouragement to the relationship.

The world has changed, society has changed and the environment has changed; and thereby the ways people show their love. Love is best manifest as a flow on a two-way street, never single-directional, whether it is between a boyfriend and girlfriend, a child and parent, or sibling and sibling. There is in fact a song titled “Love on a two-way street” with the following as its beginning lyrics:

“I found love on a two-way street and lost it on a lonely highway
Love on a two-way street and lost it on a lonely highway
True love will never die, so I've been told, but now I must cry
It's finally goodbye, I know”

It is very obvious that stability is sustained by a two-way flow. If a two-way street extends forward and ends in a lonely highway, how does it feel? No amount of words can really explain this truth as well as when we give ourselves the privilege of experiencing it personally and keenly in our sets of relationships.

This year, Mothers' Day in Singapore falls on 13th May, which is a Sunday, a non-working day. Isn't it nice for children (young unmarried ones or older married ones) to show their mother that she is not forgotten by their busyness with so many things? When we have mothers, we take for granted. When we don't have mothers, then we feel the longing that is so powerfully expressed in the famous Chinese children song 世上只有妈妈好 (Mom is best):

世上只有妈妈好, 有妈的孩子像个宝。
投进妈妈的怀抱, 幸福享不了。
没有妈妈最苦恼, 没妈的孩子像根草。
离开妈妈的怀抱, 幸福哪里找。

In brief, the song means that mother is best; a child with mother is like a precious gem; the child enjoys enduring contentment in its mother's

embrace. Conversely, a child without mother is compared to a strand of grass; the child is tormented by anguish. This is a beautiful song that adults can sing too. It was the theme song of a Chinese movie half a century ago, titled 苦儿流浪记 (Nobody's Child). I watched the movie as a kid, and still retain images of it. Interestingly, there is another unrelated English song titled "Nobody's Child" with the following lyrics:

I'm nobody's child, I'm nobody's child
Just like a flower I'm growing wild
No mommy's kisses and no daddy's smile
Nobody wants me, I'm nobody's child

Both the Chinese and English songs convey the same idea that parental love is precious to be treasured, or it would be sadly missed when gone. A strong love bond in the family can only be beneficial to all members. Parents' instinctive blood, sweat and tears in nurturing their children and the latter's sincere initiatives in filial responsibilities are two sides of the same round coin that can be considered to signify wholeness and perfection.

While Mothers' Day falls in May, you will find that with a wink of your eyes, another month goes by and Fathers' Day arrives on 17th June, which is also a Sunday. In every complete family, there is a father and mother, both of whom contribute differently and complementarily to the children's well-being. Although I am already a father myself, I think of my father and mother who are already very advanced in their ages. In reflective moments, I realize that my father and mother gave to me in dissimilar ways that were similarly driven by a common thing called sacrificial love.

Young children, especially, in their innocence (or ignorance) tend to demand a lot from their parents and give back a lot by way of misunderstandings of their parents' ideas and good intentions that are never in attractive wrappings. Perhaps the Mediacorp actress Vivian Lai also shared the same experience of tensions with her parents when she was young and at the receiving end of parental tough love; and I strongly believe that many of my brothers and sisters in Christ in the Church who are already married with children also had it as a common experience – being naïve until ... until becoming parents and coming to a moment of realization about how their truculent past not only hurt their parents but also shortchanged themselves. Days of reckoning came and went. As Christian parents, we know not just by personal experience of parenthood, but also by our Christian experience of God's love to receive and share –

to love our parents as God has loved us and be attentive to their seasoned wisdom inclusively with our own exercise of independence. We too love our children and want the best for them and hope that they understand. The Bible verse below tells us that honouring our parents is good for ourselves too:

Deu 5:16

"Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you." (See also Ex. 20:12)

Desmond Tutu (retired bishop and former Primate of the Anglican Church of South Africa) said, "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them. Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day are not just days for fathers and mothers. Without fathers and mothers, there are no children; without children, there are no fathers and mothers. So the two special days are marked out in the calendar for the family as a whole. When there is celebration, there is rejoicing; when there is rejoicing, there must be a reason. The best reason I can think of is that there is a strong love bond in the family that binds all members, and each takes it upon himself/herself spontaneously to continue in his/her effort in both tangible ways (e.g., having a simple unhurried meal together) and intangible ways (patience, tolerance, care & concern, spiritual blessings). Admittedly, it is in human nature that there are degrees of virtues and deficiencies in each and every member. Yet, it is to the benefit of all if each and every member is slow to dispense blame and excuse but quick to be selfless in effort to patch up any shortcoming he sees, to the end of building up everyone in the family whereby the benefits of a cohesive family accrue to all.

I wish all mothers a Happy Mothers' Day; all fathers, a Happy Fathers' Day; and all children, a Happy Family Day! May it be a Happy Family Day every day of the year.

John Lee

GOD OUR FATHER KNOWS BEST!

Our family wanted to celebrate Mother's Day with a brunch with my mother-in-law out at sea on 5 May. After less than 10 minutes on our cabin cruiser, 'Spirit of Joy' (Joy), for her maiden trip out, the engine died out on us and we had to have it towed back to Raffles Marina. Not wanting to disappoint everyone, Alan decided to launch his fishing boat – 'Spirit of Love' (Love) – so that we could continue as planned.

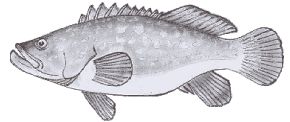
We anchored about 50m away from one of the beacons and started our little picnic. We did not intend to do any fishing. (For fishing, we would normally be anchored less than 10m away.)

Half an hour later, we decided to call it a day. When Alan was lifting up the anchor, he noted that it had unexpectedly got stuck to a *boo-boo trap (metal trap left on the seabed to trap fishes). Excitedly, we poured out the fishes. When Alan was releasing the trap back into the sea, he noted that it was linked to a second trap. Yet more fishes came in with this second trap.

All of us were so excited, especially my mother-in-law who went from being silently bored to clapping and exclaiming with a child-like victorious 'Yeah', seeing that there were close to twenty fishes of which most were around 800g. (There were 6 garoupas. ☺) The presence of some inedible crabs and other funny creatures also made the kids squeal, and clamour to release them back to the sea.



We are grateful to God for turning a disappointing start to an awesome finish.



HE knew:

- Though we carried on our plans on another boat, everyone's spirit was already dampened when we had to prematurely abort our cruising plans. (The kids were looking forward to just lazing around in the cabin comfortably, while it was Alan's mum first time out at sea.)
- We intentionally did not want to have any fishing activities on Joy so that it would be free from fishy smell. Moreover, we did not have any receptacles to keep the fishes in. While Love always has an ice box on board.
- As I was in charge of purchasing and transporting 9kg of seafood on Sunday morning for my company's BBQ at night, having an ice box with

rollers was the answer to my doubt about carrying such a heavy load from point to point.

- Our fridge had no more fish and I was planning to buy some on Sunday.

How great is our God! No fishing rod, no bait and no long hours stuck in the sun with impatient folks; not at all prepared for fishing, but had a good harvest of fish enough to share the blessings with 5 families.

I went to my HQ for a meeting on 10 May and was pretty affected by what was discussed during the meeting as well as hearing news of the intended departure of a few of my key staff when I went back to office. As a result, I had a sleepless night.

While tossing and turning, I prayed and surrendered to God asking for His Lordship to take control and wisdom to lead me in making the necessary decisions over my work, even to the extent of whether I should carry on or leave the company in view of the very tough time ahead.

Praise God for his faithfulness. Early the following morning while I was in office, Pastor Anthony messaged me Gen 39: 1-2, "It's not WHAT you have but WHO you have! Thus, stop pursuing things and start pursuing Jesus! (Because Jesus is with you, You are Already a success.)"

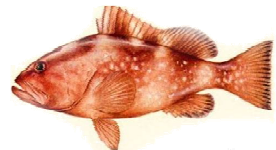
Thank God for His blessed assurance that when He is with us, we will prosper. If God is for us, who can be against us?

Thank God also for strengthening my faith a great deal in a short span of one week and letting me taste His goodness and enjoy the peace that comes from releasing my burden and trust in Him, knowing that He is my God and my all who will in His time make all things good for His purpose.



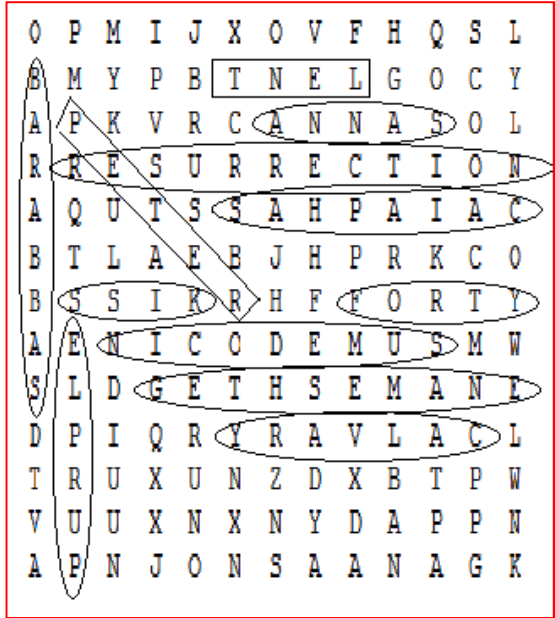
Karen Soh

**The boo-boo trap seemed like it had been lost due to the amount of barnacles grown on it. Also, the fishermen's practice is that if you hook up a trap by chance, you can keep the fishes but leave the trap back in its original position.*



ANSWERS to last issue's quiz

- Christmas is to the birth of Christ as Easter is to His RESURRECTION.
- Easter begins when the LENT season ends.
- Jesus remained for FORTY days after His resurrection.
- The soldiers placed a PURPLE robe on Jesus after stripping Him.
- Jesus and His disciples prayed in the garden of GETHSEMANE before the crucifixion.
- Judas gave Jesus a KISS to identify Him for the soldiers.
- PETER drew his sword to protect Jesus from the soldiers.
- ANNAS was the first high priest to whom Jesus was presented. (John 18:24)
- The first high priest sent Jesus to CAIAPHAS, but he had no power to inflict the punishment of death. (Caiaphas)
- BARABBAS was released instead of Jesus. (Barabbas)
- The Latin name of the place where the crucifixion took place is CALVARY.
- NICODEMUS helped Joseph prepare the body of Jesus for burial.



This is only a partially complete list....

12 May 2012 – The Dialect MLT met and one of the initiatives discussed was the compilation of a Telephone book with photos. We hope to establish good communications within our fellowship.





Being a Person Under Authority

"I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." - Matthew 8:10

The centurion came to Jesus and told Him of his servant who was paralyzed and in terrible suffering. He came to Jesus because he believed He could heal him. He told Jesus of the matter, and Jesus was willing to come with the centurion. But the centurion would not have it. He knew that Jesus, being under the authority of Heaven itself, did not have to see the servant to help him. The centurion understood authority. He understood that he himself had certain rights that his position granted him to have power over situations and people. He also was a man under authority. The centurion understood Jesus' position and what power that position held in Heaven - the power to heal his servant if He chose to exercise that authority.

When Jesus saw that the centurion understood this principle of authority and that He did not have to visit the servant to heal him, He acknowledged the centurion's faith. Jesus knew it took great faith to understand authority and whether He had the authority to do what was being asked.

God has placed a system of authority in our world that requires faith to operate under its boundaries: fathers over sons and daughters, employers over employees, government leaders over the people, church leaders over church members. These are authority structures God has placed in our lives to protect and guide us to His will. Some confuse position with worthiness or qualifications of that position. It is the position that God works through. The fact that an authority may not be a Christian may have no bearing on whether God can work through him as your authority. It is only when that authority counsels against a biblical mandate that we should not follow that person's guidance. The hand of the king is in the hand of God.

Today, we find few who understand this system of authority God has ordained. It requires great faith to operate in this realm. Yet Jesus said that when we understand this, we demonstrate the kind of faith that He rarely sees. Be a person of rare faith. See the authorities placed in your life as those God is using to protect you.

Being Choked by Wealth

"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income...." - Ecclesiastes 5:10

Workplace believers are especially susceptible to a trap in their spiritual lives - one to which others may not be so susceptible. That trap is wealth. Scripture tells us that if we are having our basic needs met for food and clothing, we are considered to have riches. Jesus cautioned us against living a lifestyle that required more than our basic necessities. However, it is clear that Jesus was not against wealth, but against a dependence on wealth. Jesus continually taught that a dependence on anything other than God was evil. Whenever Jesus determined that money was an issue for an individual, He addressed it and found that the individual could

not let go. This was true for the rich young ruler. When talking about what he must do to inherit the Kingdom, Jesus told him to do the one thing that would be the most difficult - to give away his wealth and follow Him. Jesus was not saying this was what every person must do, only the rich young ruler, because Jesus knew this was his greatest stumbling block. For others of us, it could be something else Jesus would ask us to give up (see Mt. 19:16-30).

In the parable of the sower in which He describes four types of people, Jesus also gave us another example of the problem money creates for any follower of Jesus.

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop - a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matthew 13:3b-8).

"The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22).

Much like the frog in the boiling pot, if we are not careful we gradually begin to acquire and walk the treadmill of material gain. Those around us begin to expect more and more. Soon we begin expanding our lifestyle. Before we know it, we are worrying about how to take care of what we acquire. Our emphasis becomes what we own versus our relationship with Jesus and His Kingdom. One day I woke up and realized I had a cold heart toward God. Apathy toward the things of God became apparent. I was still going through the motions of service toward God, but with no power. We wake up to realize Christ is no longer Lord of our lives, much less of our money. The greater independence money gives us, the less dependence on God we need. Christ talked much about money in the Kingdom because He knew how much of a problem it was. This is why we have so few who are bearing 100, 60, or 30 times what is sown.

Do you have the same hunger for God that you once had? Has financial blessing had an adverse effect on your passion for Jesus Christ? Ask Him today if your heart has grown cold as a result of financial blessing. Ask Him to keep you hungering for more of His presence in your life.



The photo of the 2012 Combined Retreat Committee on the left was taken when one of the members wasn't around. Can you tell who was added into the photo?

It is now only about 3 weeks or less to the 1st JCC Combined Retreat. The committee has been very busy tying up the loose ends to ensure that everything goes smoothly. There are many more things to do but by God's grace we will be ready by the appointed time.

THROWING STONES AND DEMANDING POUND OF FLESH

There is a proverb that says people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. In the Bible, there is the story about the Pharisees trying to test Jesus on whether they should stone a woman caught in adultery. Jesus replied, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7)

This Internet Age has brought with it a surge in social media, and more and more people are betraying their gross ignorance about the material that their houses are made of. Actually, they live in glass houses, but they do not know it. This is why the modern pastime of throwing stones is gaining momentum.

In this modern pastime, especially when the throwers hide behind walls, it is often that the real intent is not to focus on a fixed target but to toss random stones and barrages of stones so as to maximize collateral damages to a broad group of victims who happen to share some common denominators. Even innocent victims find themselves vulnerable because the more they try to put up their defences, the more stones come flying from all directions with the throwers shifting positions at ease and driven by their multifaceted agenda. The contemptibility of merciless stone-throwers seeking blood is not less than that of a cold-blooded Shylock seeking a pound of flesh.

In Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, Shylock was a moneylender engaged in usury. One of his imprudent borrowers was Antonio. Today, we have many Shylocks around with more respectable titles who proffer contracts with onerous terms to unsuspecting Antonios. When an Antonio is unable to pay off his loan, the Shylock would demand a pound of flesh. When Antonio protests, Shylock is well covered by the law of contracts – "See, see, the condition on pound-of-flesh levy is all stated in black and white, as you have agreed to."

Poor Antonio!

The case goes to court. The words of the contract are to be honoured, the court rules. Shylock laughs first. The court continues, "Shylock, you may have the pound of flesh from Antonio, but not a drop of his blood." The court of justice shows no sympathy to those who understand no mercy. The vindicated laughs last. The Bible has this advice in 1 Cor. 6 (MSG):

12Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, I'd be a slave to my whims.

13You know the old saying, "First you eat to live, and then you live to eat"? Well, it may be true that the body is only a temporary thing, but that's no excuse for stuffing your body with food, or indulging it with sex. Since the Master honors you with a body, honor him with your body!

The Pharisees were strict legalists, very meticulous with the law. Yet, Jesus was not impressed. Instead, the Lord rebuked them for being hypocrites.

How many of today's raucous stone-throwers who spare no mercy are showing to be legalistically right or morally high in their demands, yet betraying a Pharisaic conduct of hypocrisy with their demands for excessive recompense?

People who live in glass houses yet throw stones because they smell blood are like vultures desirous of their targets' giving up their last breath of life. Those who show no grace or mercy may one day find themselves in the same court of public vociferous opinions and media feeding frenzy in the modern Orwellian landscape, UNLESS they are so sure of themselves as without a blot by sin that they can coolly saunter past the ubiquitous cameras, electronic monitors, automatic data recorders and the pervasive rules and laws that are increasingly capable of catching the non-saints in their moments of waywardness. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt. 18:23-35) carries a good lesson on mercy shown if deserving and mercy withdrawn from the merciless.

A person who used to be a high-ranking official punishing others uncompromisingly found himself at the receiving end of punishment one day. He said this about his changeover to be a kinder person:

"I'm much kinder now than I used to be, so when I read [news about the people in trouble], I thought to myself, I'll give them a chance."

"I suppose when you get so high up the ranks, you don't think that you can make this mistake."

Kindness is not weakness. It is possible to deal with a wrong with firm action for justice without being heavy-handed. Of bystanders, there is a great difference between criticizing objectively for good and throwing stones with reckless abandon and twisted logic. It is alright to criticize someone for a bad mistake thus, "You keep coming late for work. Perhaps you can consider leaving home half an hour earlier each day. Give it a try, pal, I know you can do it. "

It is throwing stones if you start tweeting on social media or gossip grapevine, "You know, Jane is one kind. Always late. Really slothful, an idiot who never appreciates good advice. Not liked by colleagues ...," and then it becomes a wildfire with others piling up their opinions and suggestions pulling more people into the fray for condemnation with sugar and spice added for good measure, "You know her manager, Tommy Tan? He very tolerant lah. You know what, I hear that maybe ... blah blah ... we can ask the Director to do something ..."

Even if the sanctimonious advocates of stone-throwing and shaming are incapable of mistakes, it could be that the sinners who one day become openly displayed are their brothers or sisters, fathers or mothers, husbands or wives, or sons and daughters. Often, the moralizing purveyors of no-holds-barred treatments of the fallen are into their activism with sadistic pleasure. Consequently, they display a gross lack of personal dignity for their unrestrained diatribes against the defenseless. These “saints” may not have committed any infringement of the law, but I am not so sure whether they can speak with a straight face that they have not infringed conscience or sensibilities to enjoy pleasure at the expense of others. They may not have committed murder, but the Bible says:

“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

Ordinarily, we think that committing murder means “killing”, “executing” or “taking a life”. Many a time, people commit the sin of murder without even using a knife or a gun; they use a sharp object called the pen (or tongue); the pen (or tongue) is indeed mightier than a sword and becomes the murderous weapon wielded with impunity to destroy utterly the wrongdoers who still have life to live. The pages of tabloids (and more respectable publications that imitate some panache of tabloids) and the grapevine of gossipers provide lively specimens.

One cannot judge a book by its cover. A broken book that looks disgraceful may still have respectable value within. On the other hand, a book impressively bound with gilded edges may just be horrible to read.

Recently, I was on an MRT train when I saw a sweet-smelling young couple dressed to kill indulging in a little PDA while sitting sandwiched between two shabbily-dressed foreign workers who were a little odourous from a day’s accumulation of sweat on dull work clothes. I leave it to your imagination what could be the murmurs in the hearts of other travellers on the train, whether cursing with bigotry against specific groups, wishing for SMRT to implement specialized carriages or simply submitting to the unavoidable gracefully. (Just imagine as an introspective exercise; don’t jump to conclusions!) At the next station, there was a surge of commuters and a few senior citizens boarded. Pleasantly surprisingly, the “unappealing” four in a row popped up from their seats in a crowded train to offer the seats to those who needed them more. I looked around me. There were others in smart office attire comfortably seated. I felt that they might be justified to have their seats because they were awfully tired or had needs that could not be seen by a look.

How would you feel when you have to stay with 13 prostitutes and share very limited food and facilities? Squabble every day? Listening to and mouthing crudities every moment when paths cross?

“What a shame, you prostitutes! Good for nothing. Hope you will have no good ...”

“Aiya, don’t think that you are so pure lah Wait till ...”

The above is just an imagined exchange of two groups of people (one group of dignified young female students and the other group of unabashed prostitutes) constantly at loggerheads due to their contrasting habits. They were hiding from the Japanese who had invaded Nanking, China. No prize for guessing how stone-throwers or moralizers would pick their targets for condemnation. Yet, the “shameless” prostitutes were heroes. This was how it happened:

The young students were compelled to meet their doom with no way out. Not without foreboding, the “shameless” prostitutes (despite their obviously older ages) courageously volunteered themselves to impersonate the young girls and took their places, each carrying a hidden weapon on her body as they went off with the Japanese soldiers. That was a decisive sacrifice. As a result, the young students managed to steal precious time to escape to safety. In the end, only one of the honorable heroines (no longer “shameful” prostitutes) survived to testify in a post-war tribunal. Years later, one of the students told the true story to her niece who wrote it down in a book 《金陵十三钗》 which you can read at <http://data.book.hexun.com/book-6317.shtml> if you understand Chinese.

Another story here: About Tan Chor Jin (One Eyed Dragon) who murdered a night club owner, firing multiple shots at the victim without batting an eyelid while the victim’s family members cowered in horror. “A very bad-tempered guy who deserves nothing less than the death sentence.”

He got hanged in 2009, alright; but he voluntarily donated his organs to save quite a number of people. He knew his sin; but before his death, he too had a heart to care for those who needed care.

When the Bible says that all have sinned, we know what it means. All means all. We do not condone sin. We hate sin. We hate prostitution, murder, drug smuggling, homosexual lifestyles, use of bad language, provocative dressing, obnoxious behavior (such as over-the-top public displays of affection), littering (dropping a sweet wrapper is serious littering), gossiping, lying, etc. Whether in human terms you consider your sin to be big or small, pardonable or not ... Wait, I want to ask: “Is there any sinner who is unpardonable?”

Who crucified Jesus? How much did Jesus suffer under their hands? Jesus said before His last breath on the Cross, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*” (Luke 23:34)

Recently, there was this sad news that a maid left a young child sleeping while she went out to fetch his younger sibling. When she returned, the sleeping child was dead at the bottom of the block of flats. How did the parents feel? Well, this is a no-brainer question. However, the amazing thing was that the child’s mother forgave the maid, and even consoled the latter over the matter.

It is not easy to forgive; so we understand easily why people are fast going to lawyers to sue, sue, and sue for their pound of flesh. Others make mistakes and deserve to be sued for maximum penalty. We do not make mistakes; so if others sue us, we are right to defend ourselves while others who defend themselves are just trying to wiggle out of responsibility. Is this the right thinking?

It is difficult to understand why there are people who are quick to forgive even though they may have been suffering victims. The mother whose son died due to the carelessness of the maid could have demanded a pound of flesh as recompense. The family of a late patient who died because of a Singapore hospital’s dereliction of care could have sued for “maximum justice” instead of accepting the compensation money offered and then returning it as a gift to the hospital. Don’t have to try understanding, just try justifying forgiveness with this: *“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”* (Matt. 6:14)

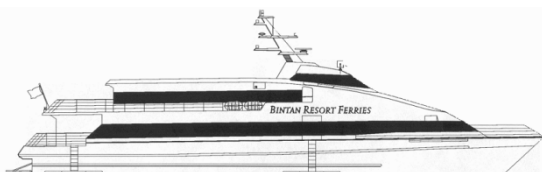
Before we castigate sinners, remember that one day we may realize (if we don’t already know that all have sinned) that we are surrounded by sinners in our home, office, church, neighbourhood and wherever we go. All who surround us are sinners; we have no place to hide from them. Only we, the surrounded ones, are above all chastisement – because we are without sin.

So we can throw all the stones that we want, demand all the pounds of flesh to keep us satiated and broadcast “their sinfulness” and “our saintliness” to the whole world. Tell it to Jesus whether you agree or not.

John Lee



Now
you
know
the
answer.



Roundup of Events in May



Sherine's father passed away in early May and at the funeral, the Dialect team was called upon to present two songs. Unprepared as they were, they formed up in the front and belted out 2 dialect songs.

Sherine wrote, "We were especially touched by the Hokkien songs sung by the dialect service members..." 2Timothy 4:2 asks us to "*be prepared in season and out of season*". Of course Paul was not referring to Hokkien songs but it is good for us to be prepared at all times.

Unfortunately, none of us were prepared to fly to Tanzania to accompany Humphrey in his time of grief. We could only uphold him in prayer.



On Mother's Day when all the mothers and youths were call to the altar area, there were only a small portion of the pews left occupied. Is this a Strength or Weakness, a Threat or an Opportunity? Next month if the fathers are called to vacate their seats, will it look so empty? Happy Mother's Day and thank you for giving a hug to Joo See on Debra's behalf.

Then there was the LCCS event at East Coast Park but I wasn't there to cover that story. Upcoming events will be the Missions Conference on June 2nd at LCOR and the Parents Day celebration by the Dialect Ministry. Be involved.

God Answers Prayers

Have you ever wondered if God answers your prayers? Do you often feel that God is silent? "Now faith is being sure of

what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1) I am referring to prayers that we hope God will answer in a particular way but we are not sure of it. For instance, we prayed that God will provide Debra a place in NUS so that she will not be away from us. She did get a place in NUS but in a course which she utterly hated. After bargaining with God to give Him all the money that it would cost us to send Debra overseas, bearing in mind that the church needed money for the rebuilding, it dawned on us that he wanted Debra in Brisbane. He did not need the money for rebuilding, He Himself can provide.

Now after more than 1½ years in Brisbane, we can appreciate that this is where God wants her to be. She is happy in her studies, happy with her friends and very active in church life. All we have is technology to keep us in contact. Do we stop praying? No! We continue to pray because ultimately God's Will will be done on earth.

What about the rebuilding? All is not lost as we wait upon God's Will for JCC. The URA has requested for another three months to consider our application. This is a faith stretching time but look at an example of what God can do:

Sally wrote to us recently that the hostel for the students in Cambodia was sold away and the students were left without a place to stay. She requested for prayers and only about a week ago the email came from Sally with the title, "God Answers Prayer!" They found another place nearby to rent for the students, furthermore, overseas partners are now willing to raise funds to purchase a unit for use as a hostel.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21)

"According to your faith will it be done to you...." (Matthew 9:29b)

Martin Cheah