

The Vine Committee

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I saw a strange thing under the sun today. I was waiting for Joo See to finish her marketing and sitting next to me at the edge of the wet market was an Indonesian maid. Apparently, she was also waiting. She was waiting for her madam to come out of the wet market with her bags of food. Now who was doing the work here? The one who was shopping or the one who was just sitting and waiting?

Can this be a parable of the lazy servant or a parable of a typical Singaporean boss? As I pondered over this situation, I wondered if this was a parable of the servant king? In most parables, one of the characters represents God, eg the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. What if the madam was the God character and the maid was us? Does it make sense?

Here we are just sitting and waiting and God is busy doing all the work somewhere in the market. He will come back to us when he has finished all the marketing and we will wait for him to bring back all the food for us. We will then help carry the food home. Do you understand the parable?

Another strange news under the sun. In the news on Saturday 18th May, there was a report of hackers soliciting cash from Facebook users, using the name of Pastor Joseph Prince. Apparently there are more than one site using the name of the New Creation Church pastor to trick people into donating cash to some orphanage in Africa. Be aware that the pastor is not using Facebook to raise funds for charity.

If the name of a local pastor can elicit funds from strangers in Facebook, why can't the name of Jesus Christ raise funds for JCC? If we see the rebuilding of JCC as just a small Lutheran congregation in Jurong trying to build a big building, then we can be assured that nothing will be built, we are incapable. However if we see this as a church built for the glory of God for the expansion

of His kingdom in this part of Singapore then surely this vision will be fulfilled if all God's people share the same vision. According to population statistics there are about 570,000 Christians in Singapore. A simple calculation will tell you that we only need a mere \$35 from each Christian to raise \$20 million.

Some of these calculations are really simple. If we sell a brick for \$50, we can raise \$28 million. I hope the Fund Raising Committee will see the big picture and raise funds from the whole people of God in Singapore. Take a lesson from the The Hiding Place which is also trying to raise funds (\$14 million) to build a new halfway house. Seriously, they are in a more precarious position than JCC yet I think they are not discouraged. They do not limit themselves to just their congregation (which is smaller than JCC), or their denomination (if any) but to all Christians. Consider the case of a beggar, if he can get every adult in the population to give him \$1, he would have at least \$2 million in the bank. To be sure GST of merely 7% can easily raise billions for tax revenue.

I asked a Muslim colleague how does the mosque raise funds for rebuilding. He told me that MUIS collects funds for mosque rebuilding. Can you calculate the impact of just 2% from the entire Muslim community for mosque rebuilding? A lesson to learn. In unity there is strength. *"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."* (Ecclesiastes 4:12b)

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." (John 14:1-2) This verse triggered a thought. When Jesus said this, He hadn't died on the cross for us yet, so no one is saved and eligible to go there yet. How many rooms is He going to prepare? We say He is God so He will know how many rooms exactly He needs to prepare.

As humans, we can only guess how many rooms we need to build. There will be 3 new primary schools even when the statistics claim that there are fewer babies. We do not have foresight only hindsight. What numbers do we have to make our calculations? Well we can take the population of 5 million less 570,000 who are already in church and that leaves us with 4.43 million unchurched. How many of these will need a church to attend? *This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.* (1Timothy 2:3-4)

My hope is that we will continue to seek God's direction and not be discouraged. *"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."* (Proverbs 16:3)

Martin Cheah

DIALECT GROUP'S SIGHTSEEING TOUR

On 23rd April, the Dialect Group went on a sightseeing tour in a 49-seater bus.



It was an extraordinary tour with the tour members hungry for pizza right from the start. So, the first stop had to be Pizza Hut at Bukit Panjang. Sitting down to a tasty meal wasn't enough. The group enjoyed a good

demo and explanation of pizza-making. The uncles and aunties showed their mental prowess despite their age when they remembered well what they were told and went on to pass a quiz segment on the history of Pizza Hut in Singapore with perfect scores.

Curiosity about pizza-making was satisfied. Hunger pangs were soothed with a delicious meal of mushroom soup, pizza and a drink.



There was yet something that the dialect group enjoyed that they could take home with them – a catchy Hokkien song that they sang with gusto to the tune of "Ia-so kio goa lai kun-te i", led by Deacon Peter:

來到武吉邦讓Pizza Hut
lai kao Bukit Panjang pizza hut
感謝上帝為我們有安排
kam sia Siong-te ui lan u an-pai
給我們明白怎樣做Pizza
ho lan beng pek an-choah choh pizza
大家又可以歡喜吃Piza
tai-ke ko u thang hoa-hi chiak pizza

After the pizza meal, the energy level was raised for a visit to an Eco-farm where we picked up information about healthy organic farming and had a mini-tour learning about the cultivation of mushrooms and beansprouts. There was free



food-tasting of mushroom cooked with vegetable. You know how it is with the uncles and aunties – their tour would not be complete without a shopping spree for the stuffs attractively displayed for their attention; i.e., vegetables, mushrooms, vitamin pills, snacks, herbal tea, etc.

We made a final stop at Tuas to visit Li An Foodstuff Pte Ltd, a major importer and exporter of biscuits (including Julie’s Biscuits) and snacks. It was a long journey there, made longer by the driver missing a turn. However, it was all worth it. The products on sale must be cheap, going by the happy purchasing by the dialect uncles and aunties who were seasoned shoppers well-versed with market pricing.

The dialect group has always enjoyed the tours organized for them. I know they are looking forward to their next one.



Peggy Tan

26 May 2013 – A day to remember for Jia Lin as she went through the waters of baptism. Was there enough water used? Well in Numbers 8:7 God says, *“To purify them, do this: Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them.”* Numbers 19:18 also mentions sprinkling of water to purify a person.

**WELCOME INTO JCC
DEAR SISTER.**



A Story of Imagination from Yunnan Tour

Christopher, Cecilia, Peggy and I visited Yunnan, China, from 29th April – 6th May. (Tour: Singapore → Kunming → Dali → Lijiang → Shangri-La → Kunming → Singapore.) Martin Cheah is expecting an interesting story from me. I didn't know what to write that would interest him and not be a run-of-the-mill type of traveller's accounts. Suddenly, I recall my tour guide telling us to let our imagination run free when visiting the Stone Forest (石林) in Kunming (the Capital of Yunnan Province). Otherwise, she said, our experience of the place would just be 远看大石头, 近看石头大. (Looking at big stones from afar and seeing that the stones are huge when getting close.) So let me begin the Story from Yunnan with our visit to the Stone Forest.



You need to be there to be amazed. The vast assortment of limestones split and



eroded by the elements to become naturally sculpted into their present gorgeous geologic formations is indeed a miracle to behold as one of the greatest nature's wonders. It took the tour group a few hours to explore just a portion of the vast place without exhausting it. I believe that if you were to visit the place on your own time schedule, you could easily allow yourself more hours (perhaps a full day) to explore its various sections – Major

Stone Forest, Minor Stone Forest and *Naigu* Stone Forest (乃古石林) – with plentiful photographic opportunities.

The Stone Forest has its superstitions among the locals, with narratives created for many unique and bewildering rock forms that are visualised as resembling animals, plants or humans. One particular rock form was given the romantic description of “Woman awaiting her husband” while another was called the “Rock of Ashima” with a love story behind it. This explains why, in Kunming, we address women as “Ashima” (阿诗玛) (instead of “小姐”, which is considered derogatory) and men as “Aheige” (阿黑哥).

Imagination! Imagination! Sanctified imagination is a gift from God; it is a faculty which we can apply to marvel at the wonders of nature and fathom God's handiworks – NOT like the way the people in Isaiah's day made use of their unholy imaginings in their idolatrous worship of objects whereby the Prophet had to remind them:

“Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things.”

— Isaiah 40:26

So much of beholding how great God is in the beautiful landscapes that He has provided man to enjoy! The intriguing shapes of the stones (given poetic names) evolved out of the work of the natural elements without intervention by human hands! More mesmerizing than the Stone Forest are the Jiuxiang (九乡) Cave and China's largest dinosaur excavation site that we visited.

The *Jiuxiang* (九乡) Cave is the largest of its size that I have ever visited, with splendid sights like a realm of its own hidden from the outside. You can imagine its size by noting that it contains the following:

- There is a gorge in which we enjoyed a boat ride to take in the wondrous sight of the natural vertical rock walls.
- Hundreds of ascending steps and hundreds of descending steps for visitors to traverse the cave in a single-direction movement (no turning back).
- There is a surreal field within the cave, made up of steps on a slope that look like a terraced paddy field. This is natural, not man-made!
- There are two waterfalls with strong water currents.
- Large stalactites and stalagmites formations are a beauty to behold
- There are big open spaces within and the walking spaces to explore the cave are ample. There is no muddiness or tight corners. The only problem for weak legs would be the large number of steps to cover. Thankfully, one may engage the services of sedan-chair carriers – in part to overcome the leg problem and in part as an experience to take away from the tour.



As mentioned above, the journey into the cave is one directional. At the exploration end, we took a cableway chairlift to the exit, and off to our tour bus.

The dinosaur excavation site we visited is called “Dinosaur Valley”. Real dinosaur bones and skeletons are on display in a museum, so many of them and so huge. Walking on a transparent platform, we could see the markings identifying fossils still buried in the sands below where archaeological work was incomplete.



After booking the trip to Yunnan, I had half-regretted it because it dawned on me that the high altitude of Shangri-La (one of the places on the itinerary) might be unsuitable. I had hoped that the tour agent would cancel the tour and offer an alternative if it could not sign up enough other participants to make up the minimum number. Alas, it turned out the tour was proceeded with. On the 3rd day, I fell sick while enroute from Kunming to Dali. By that time, I had already covered the great natural wonders on the itinerary and the sites that I would have to skip in the following days would be mainly cultural and temple-related, which I did not feel to be a great loss. Anyway, I did have a chance to attend a cultural performance at Kunming too.



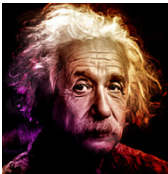
It was a blessing in disguise. The “free days” I had with Peggy (after breaking from the group at Dali) allowed us some free-and-easy time to explore the real-life street scenes of Kunming and add it to our tour experience. This added exploration of Kunming was in itself enjoyable, informative, stimulating and memorable. It was a blessing in disguise too that God arranged the early break from the tour group (at Dali) instead of later (in Lijiang or Shangri-La) so that I would not be subjected to the very much harsher conditions with poorer amenities and medical facilities at the higher altitudes.

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”
(Ps 19:1)

Very often, things are taken for granted.
We see things around us, but do not
capture into our imaginations the wonders



within them that speak of God in Creation. We sing hymns by moving our lips without making use of our other God-endowed faculties to assimilate the spiritual wealth in God’s message to us. When I went on the Yunnan tour, the nature’s wonders and sounds that I took in pointed to God’s creation as proof of His greatness; the pragmatic scenes on the streets pointed to comparative human conditions in life as proof of our relative blessedness in some aspects and were a gentle reminder for us to cap our insatiability in wants-based gold-chasing that surpasses needs-based goal seeking; and some events that happened pointed to God’s grace manifesting with His timing.



Albert Einstein said, “I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.”

I imagine, so I write. And when I write, I reveal truths that oftentimes would escape attention if not for the drive of imagination that crystallises them in form that sets on paper and thereafter leaps from it to speak for God’s purpose. As Leland Ryken wrote in the book *“The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing”*, “Reading and writing literature depend on a respect for the ability of the imagination to embody truth.”

Martin Cheah expects me to tell a story from my Yunnan tour. Well, here is the story I have told – a story of an eventful few days that I followed the tour guide’s advice to let my imagination run free, although I have done so in the bless-full way that she might not have conceived. The *Jiuxiang* (九乡) Cave and the Stone Forest are awesome testimonies of God’s handiwork, and the fossils of Dinosaur Valley present their own wonderment for us to exercise our God-given faculties to explore fresh spiritual discoveries as we superimpose our current understanding of the “New Earth Creationism” and alternative “Old Earth Creationism” against the backdrop of the Bible’s descriptions of giants like “Behemoth” (Job 40:15-24) and “Leviathan” (Job 41:1-34). Truth is revealed about how finite our knowledge is contrasted with God’s omniscience. The finiteness of our



knowledge about God's creation makes it imperative for us to put faith to work and not place trust on knowledge alone.



You can tell from this story that at first, I signed up for the tour; then I had a tinge of regret; and finally, I feel a sense of satisfaction of a tour well taken. On hindsight, the hiccups of falling ill were minor compared to the blissfulness of sensing God's grace and blessings. There were other places I visited in Kunming (including a park

where the longest Chinese couplet composed of 180 Chinese characters resides). I shall stop here and leave it to your imagination the rest of the fun in Yunnan.

JOHN LEE



HAVE JCC GROWN OVER THESE 46 YEARS?

A very short story. Someone mentioned that since we had remained around 250 members for the past 46 years, it means we have not grown. Someone else disagreed because our numbers remained constant even though we have members leaving. Go figure.

Assuming we lose 20 members per year. That means over 46 years there were members moving out numbering 920 people. If we had managed to keep our back door closed, today JCC would be a church of 1,170 strong.

We are a growing church which needs to learn how to retain our members.

Martin Cheah

FAMILY DAY @ BOTANICAL GARDENS

24 May 2013. As I drove to the church, I notice the skies were not bright and sunny as it should be. The night before, there were many thundering sounds but hardly any rain fell over Jurong. I was hoping that the weather would hold in this cloudy pattern for the time we would be spending at the Botanical Gardens so that we could enjoy our Family Day in the open.



We gathered in JCC and waited for the people to arrive and register for the outing. Soon the buses arrived and we boarded

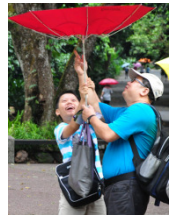


them and were on our way. Sadly even before we reached the end of Yuan Ching Road, it began to rain, quite heavily too.



As the buses travelled towards the Botanical Gardens, I was hoping that the rain would stop or that it was a local rain in Jurong only. There were pockets of hope along the way.

However, when we reached Tyersall Road, there was still a drizzle. Most of the elderly took to shelter at the National Orchid Gardens while the youngsters took off on the Heritage Trail. After about twenty minutes, Freddie and Peggy came back to inform us that we could make use of the symphony stage, which is a sheltered area, for our gathering.



Like Moses and Miriam, they led the exodus from the National Orchid Gardens to the Symphony stage. There the elderly stayed the whole time of our stay in the Botanical Gardens while the young generation went out exploring the promised land. I am sure none of us complained about the lack of water because it rained intermittently the whole time we were there. In fact if there were any complaints it would be



why did we have so much water and so could not enjoy the gardens.

Yet, if we count our blessings, there would be many. We had cool weather when the CG planners were afraid of the heat in the open field. We had our fun and games and lunch in the shelter while it rained and drizzled all around us. We were all protected from injury although one youngster did get thoroughly soaked when he took a dip in the moat that surrounds the Symphony stage. We can even count ourselves blessed when compared to those who celebrated Vesak Day by making a prayer walk up the temple at Bishan on the eve. The thundering sounds we heard in Jurong was from the heavy downpour at Bishan.



So indeed dear brothers and sisters, count your blessings even in the rain. I couldn't find a suitable verse to close so I proposed this from Acts 14:17b, *"He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven"*



Depression vs. Cancer

Last month (April), the son of a mega-church pastor in the States committed suicide after a failed battle with depression. It sets my mind thinking.

A few years ago, a 42-year-old church pastor in Singapore took his own life after a bout of depression. We know that even in JCC, sadly and not so long ago, some members had their lives cut short because of depression.

Some cancers are known to be silent killers. If victims themselves are not aware of the cancers, how would outsiders know? Depression, like cancer, can also be a silent killer. It may not arise in full force out of a sudden. It creeps up slowly, festering into a gutter of emotions waiting to explode with a senseless consequence, with signs hidden and unnoticed. Unfortunately, Christians are not immune from cancer; and a whole host of distresses, misfortunes and woes that lives are presented with – and the beast called depression!

Some people say that suicides do not happen at the spur of the moment. There is evidence of suicides being carefully planned. Yet, this last statement seems to carry a paradox. If a person is in distress with loss of hope and purpose in life, and has lost sanity whereby he contemplates the extreme act of leaving it all, he somehow may still possess the mental facility to do careful planning and to hide his grievous inclination from people around him. A paradoxical situation like this suggests to us that if we want to be of help to our brothers and sisters who are facing deleterious moments of leave-or-stay (yield-or-live) decision-making, we need sharp eyes and highly sensitive cognitive antennas.

When “ordinary sheep” feel down and out, they can turn to their shepherds (pastors) for support. When shepherds (pastors) themselves face a personal life-threatening fragility under the stressors of life and ministry, who can they turn to?

We “ordinary sheep” often and expectedly look up to those above us (our pastors) for answers to our issues. Unfortunately and disappointingly, we often find no answers or help. We must not forget that our pastors are as much human with their sense of powerlessness and personal vulnerabilities as Elijah, Jonah, Job, Moses and other Bible characters whom we esteem yet who contemplated death as a way out of their pain:

- Elijah begged to die. “It’s too much, LORD,” he prayed. “Take away my life; I might as well be dead!” (1 Kings 19:4 GNT)
- Job lost his hope and will to live. “What strength do I have to keep on living?
Why go on living when I have no hope?” (Job 6:11 GNT)
- The heat of the sun added to Jonah’s stress. “I am better off dead than alive,” he said. (Jonah 4:8 GNT)
- Moses stressed out by his responsibility as a leader. Observe the angst in his words, “... have pity on me and kill me, so that I won’t have to endure your cruelty any longer.” (Numbers 11:15 GNT)

A well-respected mega-church pastor felt powerless to save his own son from the death knell of depression. Whether ordinary sheep, esteemed leaders or revered Church Fathers – all are human and fraught with ordinary human weaknesses and powerlessness that show up from time to time. There is nothing more potent than to experience stress itself to understand how it is like to be at the receiving end of it so that we are more sensitive to our brothers and sisters that we do not in our inattentiveness dole out unnecessary loads that we would not welcome on ourselves.

Two VVIPs in Singapore were diagnosed with cancer at about the same time; one of them succumbed while the other overcame the disease. Pathogens, carcinogens and all kinds of toxins are in the air we breathe, and we cannot stop breathing for 100% safety. Different individuals have different thresholds of tolerance, and this applies to stress too as a “toxin” that affects mental health. On occasions, we see persons behaving strangely in public places because of schizophrenia or depression; and we just move away from them, thankful that we are alright and never thinking for a moment that these “weird” persons were once as fine as you and I.

When we hear news of dengue, or of increasing incidences of cancer, we take precautions. When we look around us – in workplace, marketplace, social gatherings, church or home neighbourhoods – do we care to look for increasing signs of emotional disturbances that are affecting others

and might come upon ourselves like cancer genes or disease pathogens? Do we take wise steps for time-outs from stressors (never mind what others do that tend towards offsetting our effort) as diligently as we take steps to fight the mozzies and dengue? Equally responsibly, do we proactively take cognizance of our actions that put stress on others and do we curb our preoccupations with so many personal concerns that we disregard the health interest of our neighbours?

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We take care of it – eat healthily, do not smoke, avoid excessive alcohol, stress, etc. However, there is no guarantee that we do not fall ill. We can tell people that life is God's gift and taking a life is murder; but this is no guarantee that people (even God-loving people or their loved ones) do not lose their fight against the toxic stressors that weigh down their mental and emotional defences. Note the examples of Elijah, Job and Moses above-mentioned. Be conscious of the people we love in church or family, and their dependents, who are in need of empathy and help rather than castigation or condemnation for any unfortunate circumstance that they may fall into. The attitude that we desire from others towards us is the same attitude that we would want to deal out; and many of the strange or weird behaviours we see in public places deserve every ounce of our understanding and forbearance while we are thankful that we ourselves are in the fortunate situation of being sentient to deal out graciousness.

There are reasons we are not fully aware of why some Christians fall and even die because of sin; but all, you and I, have sinned and we are saved by God's grace. If, though we sin, we are not condemned by God because we believe in Jesus Christ (John 5:24), we are certainly not entitled to pass critical remarks on anyone who has fallen down. Instead, we may have to be more introspective if we happen to be the ones who could have rendered help but neglected doing so until it is too late to regret.

What do you think the following quotations tell us?

- “Depression on my left, and loneliness on my right. They don't need to show me their badges. I know these guys very well. – Elizabeth Gilbert
- Cancer is a journey, but you walk the road alone. There are many places to stop along the way and get nourishment - you just have to be willing to take it. – Emily Hollenberg

Elizabeth is an American novelist who knows depression and loneliness “very well”, by her admission, but she does not surrender to the beast. In her memoir “Eat Pray Love”, she recounts her discovery during her round-the-world travels after her divorce. Emily is a cancer survivor.

Whether you have a cancer gene lurking or you are just someone like anyone who has faced or will face some degree of depression like anyone else in life, you can be a survivor like Elizabeth and Emily. Very importantly, know your friends while you also put in sincere efforts to be a friend.

JOHN LEE

News in Brief

JCC Mission Ministry will be making a visit to Cambodia in early June. Our adventures will be in the next issue of The Vine.

18 May 2013
LCS Exco now comprise of 2 members from JCC. Yoon Chong from the Chinese Section and Yew Moi from the English.



Eve of Family Day Preparations

The night before the Family Day, the 2 CGs gathered to gift wrap the prizes and the goodie bags. After a final briefing, a short prayer and everything was ready.





Watch the action in Youtube: <http://youtu.be/Me0qdTnQUWA>