The humility escalator

What God knows

What everybody in the universe knows

What everybody on earth could know

What everybody on earth knows

What I know

“When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers – the moon and the stars you set in place – what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?”

Psalm 8:3, 4, NLT
‘God will take care of each of us’

by Ted N. C. Wilson, General Conference President

I’m glad to make contact with you, our wonderful church members around the world. God has protected and cared for His church, and by God’s grace you have been protected this week, for the good of our country. We will get through this, and you will have opportunities to interact with people, using appropriate social distancing.

But this also could be a time of opportunity. We have been helped to see the need to respond to people’s spiritual needs. We can be the church of Jesus Christ in this crisis, by being there for our members.

Maybe a church member has a specific need and you could help them. You can at least phone them and share words of encouragement. We will get through this by God’s grace, and meanwhile you will be helping proclaim the three angels’ messages when you point people to God’s Word and the good news that Jesus is coming soon.

I want to share a beautiful portion of Psalm 34 (NKJV), beginning at verse 4. ‘I sought the Lord, and He heard me; I cried out, and He answered me.’ You can believe that God will hear you – always. Sometimes He doesn’t respond immediately, but He hears and will respond in an appropriate way. The psalmist continues, ‘. . . and delivered me from all my fears.’ You and those around you may fear the future, but God can use you to help others be grounded in the One who can take away that fear – Jesus Christ.

‘The Greek gymnasium of the ancient city of Sardis’

David Neal, Editor

Letter to the church in Sardis

Revelation 3:1-6

The Greek gymnasium of the ancient city of Sardis

Wake up, church!

Obey (verse 3 continued)

In the very definition of the term ‘obey’, there is the call to listen. We live in an era of low trust. Until very recently, ‘experts’ were always right, and fashion and could not be trusted. Western society has had enough of them, and somehow had become incredibly distrustful of authority. Is it possible that we’re not so confident as we once were about the authority of Scripture or of life? Perhaps we need to admit that there’s a bit of the Frank Sinatra ‘I’ll do it my way’ theology in all of us. How quickly times can change, for at this moment in time it is the experts who are saving our lives. It is only in following their advice that we keep safe.

Reign It’s a term that seems to have gone out of fashion, but I hear very little these days about the ‘born again’ experience as described by John in his gospel (John 3). Rabbi Nicodemus comes to Jesus seeking good conversation. He has heard about Jesus, and is thrilled to meet him at last. There is good conversation alright, but not in the direction Nicodemus expected it to go. ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God’ (John 3:3, ESV). The experienced rabbi was used to being in control, but this new teacher stirred him to the core.

To ‘be born of the Spirit’ – what is that all about? What to do? This is not the time or place to face a reality: the church is asleep!1 The second action is for the church to gather together a remnant. Call together the committed ones: those who feel a calling to watch, a calling to pray, and a commitment to serve (Matthew 26:41). Is it not the case that remnant people are expectant people, with one ear finely tuned for the Holy Spirit to lead and direct? And with the other ear they are equally tuned in to serve their fellow humanity with the love of the Christ living and working through them. Whatever gifts and talents they have, they use to wake up a dying church – and build it up for His glory.

Strengthen what remains (verse 2 continued)

Jesus sees that not all will wake up, because the second action is for the church to gather together a remnant. Call together the committed ones: those who feel a calling to watch, a calling to pray, and a commitment to serve (Matthew 26:41). Is it not the case that remnant people are expectant people, with one ear finely tuned for the Holy Spirit to lead and direct? And with the other ear they are equally tuned in to serve their fellow humanity with the love of the Christ living and working through them. Whatever gifts and talents they have, they use to wake up a dying church – and build it up for His glory.

Remember (verse 3)

We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.2 Those familiar words of Ellen White encourage us. When the church is timid and afraid – and asleep – it is because it has forgotten its roots. Remember the story? Christ came, Christ lived, Christ died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again! This in-between time can at times be arduous, for both Him and us: but we are not left alone, and it is the very Spirit of Christ who is able to wake us up from the church out of its sleep. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). Christ is both Lord of the church and the Life-giver: our community of faith at times seems far too risk averse to allow the Holy Spirit to take control of our work. Sometimes we work and act as if there is no Spirit hovering over us – having gone ahead of our work, softening hearts and minds.

Obey (verse 3 continued)


*Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White, p. 334
As the COVID-19 global health crisis continues, two nurses on the front line share their upfront and personal experience.

Care in a crisis
by Moira Surridge

S
ocial distancing, or lockdown, started on Monday 23 March 2020, and the world as we knew it was the end of life as we knew it. At 7.30am on the following day I started my first 12.5-hour shift in Watford General ICU, and I was terrified!

Before I knew it, I was looking after three critically ill ventilated patients, with help from non-ICU-trained staff. Talk about a baptism of fire

Under ‘normal’ circumstances, a nurse would only ever care for one ventilated patient at a time, but these were far from normal times as I have ever experienced in my 40 years of nursing!

Wearing the precious PPE that you all read about daily, I found day one to be really frightening. I knew beyond any doubt that I was going into the thick of a COVID-19 hotspot. If I got it wrong, I could die. Was I ready for that? How was I going to tell my family, my mum and dad, that I had offered to work in the thick of this nightmare?

Be under no illusion: COVID-19 is a nightmare. It brings devastation to people’s lives, it is not fussy who it nestles in, and it kills quickly and certainly. In all my life I have never witnessed anything like it. The culmination of all this for me was Friday 17 April, when one of the nurses from our own hospital peacefully passed away. The sadness for us all was raw, palpable, and I will never forget it.

Over the weeks we have sadly lost many patients to COVID-19, but not one patient has died on their own, despite the fact that family members often could not be present. I held the hands of two patients as they gently breathed their last, speaking of memories of their loved ones and happier times. It was absolutely heart-wrenching and unforgottable, but important precious moments were shared.

So why am I now writing this article after weeks of exhaustion, tears, and nights when all I dream about are the patients I have been looking after all day and wish I could forget? Because I have never felt so uplifted by moments of pure kindness and love that others have shown me.

Every homecoming I have been greeted with newly baked goodies, fresh fruit salad, cups of tea, and acceptance that all I want to do is have a shower and go to bed! The kind words of encouragement on shift from my beautiful colleagues have meant so much — when it all seems too hard to do, someone somehow always offers a supportive word, smile, or gesture of understanding. My wonderful family, without whom I would never have got through shift after shift, have sent supportive texts, cards, flowers and goody-bags.

Writing this has brought back sad moments and terrifying feelings, but most of all I now know how precious kind words, family, and friends are, and how precious life is. Never forget the wonderful gift of life that God has given us, and the hope we all have in a future with Him.

As a prophetic movement, with a sense of mission and purpose, we cannot have come to this point in time and history without reflecting on what this all says to us... Most of us are probably uneasy; worry about what we will meet tomorrow. Do we go back to yesterday or do we face another day of terror — or the Lord’s return? We believe that while nations make plans, God will unmake them and replace them with His own. God is the One who owns the future and who decides finally how it shall look. God will end it all at His chosen hour, but until then we must attend to our personal readiness, and we must attend to the mission He has given us to accomplish.

Surely (these events) are a wake-up call for us individually and for us as leaders of a church with plans for missions. Whatever is considered safe and secure — buildings or stocks on the market — are in reality fragile, and not the most important. I must be able to know for myself, personally, that knowing Christ is quite enough.

Yes, I will be responsible about all my material goods, I will be a responsible steward. But I can do without the goods I have collected. I cannot do without Christ. That is how I would like to face the end-time... The diet which the news networks have served us these past two weeks has been of one kind. It is almost hypnotising to watch. What we have seen is very painful and very unsettling. Fear and questions about what will come next are constantly pressing in on us and our communities. That is the way the world is, and we are part of the suffering world. But we are also Adventists, and we long for Him to come back and close this chapter on human suffering. And to that end we live our lives, and make our choices, and engage in His mission.

Dr Paulsen concluded his address with the words of Jude 24 & 25.

To see the full report, go to: https://www.adventistreview.org/archives/2001-1539/news.html.
Returning tithes and giving offerings under lockdown

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Returning by cheque: cheques are payable to North England Conference.

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I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your faithfulness and generosity in supporting the church during this very difficult time. Please rest assured, the coronavirus will pass. May the Lord bless you and keep you safe.

Emanuel Gue, President

**Welsh Mission**

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Returning by card payment: call the Welsh Mission treasury office on 01923 672251.

To assign your donation to your local church, write the name of your church on the back of the cheque, and include your Gift Aid number if you're a Gift Aider.

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**Receivers of Weekly: £7\,000**

**Receivers of Monthly: £21\,000**

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God’s character and the last generation
by Andrea Luxton

In 2018, Pacific Press invited Adventist theologians to review the relationship between the role of God’s salvation work and the human response in the context of the reality of His Second Coming. Their collected essays are published in the book God’s Character and the Last Generation, edited by Moskala Peckham. While this article was written as the preface to the book, the matters it raises, as Dr Luxton says, are critically important for us all.

In the twenty-first century, the place of faith, of a life lived in the power of the Gospel, has become too often decried as a life of weakness or irrelevance. Like to ask us the question, ‘When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?’ (Luke 12:32). A faith that is persistent in its longing for the Second Coming of Christ, a faith that has power not because of the person who exercises it, but because of the One whose sacrifice validates that faith.

The collection of essays focuses on that very intersection: the reality of Christ’s coming back to earth, and the role He plays in the lives of those of us who live in this generation. Appropriately, the essays are written by theologians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who are passionate about the Gospel as expressed through the theology of the Church. It is also appropriate because these themes are so central to the theology and eschatology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are uniquely positioned to speak of these things.

We are uniquely positioned, first because as a church we do believe unequivocally in the saving power of Christ’s sacrifice through faith alone. The five-hundred-year celebration of the Reformation, 2017, was an appropriate time to remember how our history aligns with those ideals. Our faith is not in human power, but in the power of Christ; that is, the moral power of His love. Yet linked to this Adventist conviction of the centrality of the Gospel and our justification through the blood of Christ is also our unique commitment to the immensity of the Second Coming that will change the alignment of authority and power forever. That is when we will finally understand unequivocally that true authority and power reside squarely in the character of God. So it is out of a commitment to the intersection of these two important beliefs (justification by faith and the reality of the Second Coming) that this book speaks to the readers, holding a renewed commitment to faith through Christ alone and to an active belief in the Second Coming of Christ.

This intersection, of course, does not come without challenges and questions. Throughout the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, not unlike that of the wider Christian church, debates have emerged regarding how exactly our eschatology affects the balance between salvation through faith alone and the importance of how we live. How does Christ’s role as Mediator deepen our understanding of the Saviour’s role in salvation? Can we ever move beyond our life of sinfulness to live a pure life as Christ lived? Do we even want to seek that?

As a church, we do have high standards for living a life of holiness. While justification by faith is the basis of salvation, that knowledge of salvation and a continually deepening relationship with our Saviour should change the way we live. Yet that never leaves behind our reliance on the sacrifice of Christ and the reality that our holiness is His holiness. To do otherwise not only leads to an over-emphasis on our right works, with an ensuing discouragement at the reality of our humanness, but it also leads us too easily in the path of judging others, whom we might perceive as holding back the Second Coming due to not living more perfectly, both are dangerous positions because they shift our focus away from Christ and in effect repeat the danger of Trafalgar Square – reliance on the human rather than the divine.

I was asked the other day whether the events we see around us at this point in history lead me to any particular conviction about the Second Coming of Christ. ... lives. I see the future in the reality of God’s moral power, not our human efforts; and that is where my confidence lies.

Are these issues important? Critically so. This book and its writers seek to remind us of the importance of keeping our focus on our faith and our mission at this important time of history. It reminds us of the dangers of over-determining the future that is God’s, or of focusing too much on the human rather than the divine. In so doing, this book firmly places salvation at the cross and sees our actions as a reflection of the character of God, which we are reminded of daily. These theologians are also individuals of faith. They speak from a range of perspectives, but all focus on the same message – the one reiterated at the beginning of Hebrews 12: ‘And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart’ (verses 1-3, NIV).

If you would like to dig deeper about the role of our faith and mission in this time of earth’s history, God’s Character and the Last Generation is well worth the read, for personal use or in small study groups. Edited by Moskala Peckham, it is available for purchase at the following link:

https://lifesourcebookshop.co.uk/product/gods-character-and-the-last-generation/
**Getting ready**, ‘getting ready’, forever ‘getting ready’: how frequently does one hear these words fall from the lips of devout and sincere Adventists, whether in exhortation or in prayer?

‘Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow Creeps in this petty pace from day to day To the last syllable of recorded time...’

*William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Claim to be more holy than the prophet Isaiah? That, surely, would be open to question! May God indeed give every one of us such a vision of Himself, so that we too, like the publican in Jesus’ parable, praying in the temple, shall be compelled to cry out: ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’ For Jesus concluded, ‘I tell you, this man went down to his house justified’ (Luke 18:13, 14, KJV).

Let us come straight to the point: getting ready is salvation by works; being ready is salvation by grace. Being ready is the only salvation on offer by God. Being ready is the reliance of the penitent soul entirely and alone upon theatonizing sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The work of atonement is accomplished and complete (John 19:30). Nothing can be added to it, nor can anything be revoked. Being ready is the acceptance, assurance and experience of the adequacy of Christ’s atoning sacrifice (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Being ready, ready now, this very moment, is the only spiritual condition that will avail when Jesus returns. ‘They... have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (Revelation 7:14, KJV).

‘Getting ready’? No! Being ready, ready now: nothing less is requisite; nothing more will suffice. We can be ready now; we should be ready now; we must be ready now. We can hope for no more; God will be satisfied with no less: for our faith is in the Saviour, not in ourselves. Holiness is expected of me, and I can never relax my endeavours in that direction; but I know that God accepts me not because of my attainments, but because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice alone. For how do we qualify for God’s grace? By our need (Romans 3:23, 24); and we shall stand in need of God’s grace incessantly (Romans 5:12), and shall do until this ‘corruptible puts on incorruption’, and ‘this mortal’ puts on ‘immortality’ (1 Corinthians 15:53, KJV).

When you and I knock at the gates of peace, may we not presume to present our own credentials – they shall be totally inadequate, and we shall be instantly turned away. Presenting the credentials of the Saviour, we shall be instantly admitted. Ready now shall be the only valid entry permit into God’s presence when Jesus comes – or we would be like the foolish virgins of Jesus’ parable, whose lamps were empty, and they did not know it, when the Bridegroom finally arrived; and they knocked and called in vain to be admitted into the wedding celebrations with empty lamps. Is our lamp filled with the light and life-giving oil of the Gospel (Romans 1:16, 17)? If not now, when? Shall we not this moment, in place of the ‘ready’, do the ‘not ready’ (Isaiah 64:6), avail ourselves of the spotless ‘robe’ of Christ’s righteousness (Isaiah 61:10)?

‘Getting ready’ is a vain hope, unnecessary deprivation, uncalled-for delay! We must be ready now, this very instant, in truth.

The question simply is, ‘What is not now available for our salvation and acceptance by God?’ That rests upon Christ’s sacrifice alone, and our response comes today (Hebrews 3:15; 2 Corinthians 6:2). The ‘latter rain’ surely is to empower the ministry of the Gospel message: the fact that it hasn’t yet arrived is not a reason to defend our personal acceptance of the Gospel, and doesn’t diminish the present power of the Gospel to bring about the visibly ‘ready’

The Advent Hope in Scripture and History, p. 147

### Ever ready

As never before, Christians need a faith: a faith that keeps a steady gaze on the coming Christ beyond the crisis.

*Christ, and not the crisis, should occupy their minds.* For not so much what is coming as who is coming should occupy the mind.

(Norman Gulley, Christ in Coming, p. 24)

### The positive effect of the Christian hope

‘If we say this truly, “Come, Lord Jesus”, undoubtedly it will have an influence on us all. It will stir up graces in us: as faith, to lay hold upon it; hope to expect it; love to embrace it; patience to endure anything for it; heavenly ministration, to fit and prepare for it... Always live in expectation of the Lord Jesus “coming in the clouds”, with oil in [our] lamps, and “prepared for His coming”.’

Richard Sibbes, Puttan preacher, quoted in The Advent Hope in Scripture and History, p. 147

### Talents and opportunities

**Three appearances, or comings, of Christ are set forth in Scripture:**

- ‘His appearing in the flesh, when He lived a holy life on earth’
- ‘His appearing in ... the lives of believers by the Gospel’
- ‘His appearing in glory at the last day’

Christopher Love, quoted in The Advent Hope in Scripture and History, p. 146

To discover more about the difference between ‘getting ready’ and ‘being ready’, watch the following sermon series, EverReady 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5.

*EverReady 1*

‘Eschatological Caffeine’

https://subsplash.com/luc/media/-ml/4++3f4ue

*EverReady 2*

‘Caught in the Act!’

https://subsplash.com/luc/media/-ml/4+c+bi6d

*EverReady 3*

‘When the Bridegroom’s Late’

https://subsplash.com/luc/media/-ml/45b4217

*EverReady 4*

‘The Audit’

https://subsplash.com/luc/media/-ml/4+be02d

*EverReady 5*

‘When the Final Gavel Falls’

https://subsplash.com/luc/media/-ml/4+5o737

Series index

https://subsplash.com/luc/media/-ml/4+e58ac04

### Stay, pray, play, pray

**Justice in a pandemic**

By Catherine Anthony Boldeau

The onslaught of COVID-19 in the UK has highlighted the excessive inequality in the UK between those who lack access to the basics in life and those who have more than they can use. The April Independent reported the story of Tom, a 54-year-old London construction worker who’d lost his job due to an injury: he’d been sleeping rough for five years.

At first, he managed by attending drop-in centres to shower, spending his days in cafes and pubs for shelter. At night, his refuge was a seat on a bus. But the lockdown changed his life. After the lockdown, he has been aimlessly walking the streets or finding himself tucked away in the corner of a park. Sometimes, if he’s able, he finds a public bench to sit on, or a bus stop shelter that he can use. For food, his lifeline is the takeaway meal from several of the food kitchens that are open in London.

Tom is one of the hundreds of rough sleepers who have not yet been offered housing during the coronavirus pandemic, according to the charity Crisis, who say that there are an estimated 3000 people across the country who are still sleeping rough. So many shops, offices, schools and places of worship remain closed – places of safety and warmth – yet there are still homeless people on our streets, which is heart-rending. But what are we, as Seventh-day Adventists, doing to help these people? What are we doing to make their lives a little more bearable?

Our faith demands that we obey the laws of the land, providing they do not conflict with the laws of God, so we should stay home as much as possible; but any bowels of compassion closed when we consider the needs of others?

As well as staying, I encourage you to pray to ensure that surface areas within the home and on clothes are disinfected and organisations in some quarters state that we should be disinfecting our work spaces every 20 minutes.

We have recently tightened the lockdown to ‘house arrest’. Just the thought of being inside all day, every day, is a toll, for many, on our mental well-being. We are encouraged to play, and play can mean reading, learning a new skill, or catching up on unread books.

And, of course, to pray is essential. Our online services on Zoom, Skype and other platforms have increased, and are absolutely vital at this time. Especially during a pandemic, we need to ‘pray without ceasing’. 

But how does my brother or sister receive food if I do stay, play, pray, pray? How do the elderly receive their medications if I simply shut the door, increase my hygiene practices, entertain myself and thank God that I am well?

Richard Sibbes, Puritan preacher, quoted in The Advent Hope in Scripture and History, p. 147
Part 9:

Where can you go to see the Kingdom of God?

Steve Logan, a scientist living in Scotland and a member of Crieff Church, once challenged me with the question that is the title of this chapter: where can people go to see the Kingdom of God? Steve continued to press his point by saying that we cannot send them down to the local supermarket to ask for a pack of it.

The second issue is the anomaly that at times it is easier to see the values of the Kingdom of Heaven in the ‘supermarket’ than in the church. Two examples of the secular practice of Kingdom values come to mind. A recent book by Joseph Michelli entitled The New Gold Standard outlines the Ritz-Carton-embedded culture of non-judgemental and generous service (see chapter 20 of this book). The hotel chain makes the claim that it is ‘the world’s gold standard’ in serving people. Shouldn’t that be the church’s claim? Ritz-Carton employees are proud of their organisation and its record of outstanding service that keeps its customers coming back for more. An example (and I choose this story because it is often in the small actions that a value is revealed) that Michelli relates is of a waitress who is asked by a girl in a family she is serving if they have a particular type of ice cream that doesn’t appear on the menu. The waitress, instead of just giving a smiling apology (which surely would be fully acceptable), says, ‘Let me see what I can do.’ She then asks another waiter to cover her tables while she pops round to an ice cream shop she knows, buys the right type, rushes back to the hotel kitchen, and emerges with the other desserts plus the ice cream the girl asks for. That is gold-standard service. In answer to Steve’s question about where to see the Kingdom of Heaven, dare the answer be, ‘At a Ritz-Carton hotel’?

The other example is the practices of people care that Nordstrom employees give to their customers. In reviewing the book, The Nordstrom Way, by Robert Spector and Patrick McCarthy, Tom Peters (a leadership guru) states that ‘Nobody does it better than Nordstrom’. A church reply should be, ‘That’s nonsense – we practise people care better than anyone!’ After all, this is where the Kingdom values are to be seen.

One of Nordstrom’s tools of the trade is the personal customer book (see page 184 of the above book) that sales assistants carry. In that small book the associate records all the details they can obtain about each person they serve – their names, phone numbers, purchases, likes and dislikes, etc. Eventually they build up a confidential dossier about each customer that enables them not only to remember their names the next time they visit the shop, but to relate with such personalised care that the customer seeks them out, knowing that they are cared for. What a lesson for our diac具体官 to learn. Sometimes we can’t even remember our members’ names, let alone those of any visitors and their children. I decided to trial Nordstrom’s tool. At two churches that I visited, I recorded on my mobile phone the names and any identifying details of those I spoke to. At one church I recorded the names of 40 people I interacted with, and at the other I wrote down 15. As I had the opportunity I reviewed the names and faces and was amazed that at the end of the service I was able to speak to most of them again using their first names. While without this chapter I went to my phone record and found that I could still remember almost a month later, 37 of the 40 names I had recorded in the first case and 14 of the 15 in the other. This was staggering, because I am normally terrible at remembering names. I even momentarily forget my wife’s name on occasion! The personal Christian Nordstrom tool took me to a new level of care and service. This is Chapter 23 of this book, where I list some suggestions that may be helpful to you and your church leaders who are tasked with meeting and greeting at church. And again, the reply to Steve’s question should be that we would do well to point viewers of the Kingdom of Heaven to the ‘supermarket’ rather than to some of our churches.

There may be some readers that may object to any comparison between the church and secular organisations on the grounds that they are the children of the world and not the children of light, and so cannot possibly represent the Kingdom of Heaven. My reply would be that Jesus Himself stated that ‘the children of darkness do not make their children shine brighter than the light’ (Luke 16:8, KJV). He also said ‘the lights of the Gentiles shine forth in all the world’ (Matt. 5:15, ESV). It may be that we have created a wrong impression in implying that the Kingdom can only be seen in the church. The reality may be that, just as Jesus saw examples of the Kingdom of Heaven everywhere they happened to appear, so we today may also find the Kingdom of Heaven wherever it erupts or invades our dark planet. Whenever we see the values of grace, mercy, humility, peace, purity, service, meekness, right actions, etc. manifested, we should rejoice to see examples of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The third issue is the failure, at times, of the local church to be the place where the Kingdom can be seen. Surely it is here where the values of the Kingdom of Heaven should be most easily seen. The church does not always fail. There are magnificent stories and examples of churches and members being marvellous windows into the Kingdom, but there are serious failures too. I am not expecting perfect churches – and we should keep in mind that there must certainly be customers who have had bad experiences with other organisations like Ritz-Carton and Nordstrom – but the difference that concerns me is the difference that the secular organisation can presumably embed values like exceptional customer service and customer care into the fabric of their culture, many of our churches struggling to do the same. So the question is: are we doing better? Here are some questions we need to ask ourselves. Why can’t Ritz-Carton be doing the best in giving service while we are often too proud to trumpet our commitment to being servant? Maybe it is not pride on our part; maybe it is embarrassment at failing to serve. And why can Nordstrom train its assistants to amazing levels of customer care while we struggle along, feeling we are not doing what we feel amazingly welcome in our churches?

On exploring this issue with some churches, the reply has come back that the secular organisations do it well because they are paid and motivated by a profit incentive. It would be a very sad commentary on our understanding of the Gospel if we were to conclude that if we paid our deacons and deaconesses they would serve better. Maybe the world serves for profit, but who are we to judge? At least they give clear examples of doing it well. Assuming they serve well for an earthly crown, is not the ‘unfainting crown of glory’ (1 Peter 5:4, ESV) that we aspire to worth much more? And is not the kingdom they aspire to a temporal and fading one, while ours is an eternal and glorious Kingdom?

It is not the local supermarket that aspires to represent the Kingdom of Heaven. That is the claim and privilege of the church. Even though supermarkets may provide glimpses into the values that belong to a better world, it is the church, worldwide and local, that has to be the window to the values of the Kingdom. And so, too, shouldn’t the local church be the place that intentionally aspires to be the place to see the Kingdom of Heaven at its best?

I am arguing that the church, worldwide and locally, has the divine responsibility of working out what the core and exceeding values of the Kingdom of Heaven are, stating and embedding them into its life and practice, then holding itself accountable to those values.

The Nordstrom Way, by Robert Spector and Patrick McCarthy, Tom Peters (a leadership guru) states that ‘Nobody does it better than Nordstrom’. A church reply should be, ‘That’s nonsense – we practise people care better than anyone!’ After all, this is where the Kingdom values are to be seen.

Where can you go to see the Kingdom of God?

S

How would you answer the question? This should be a straightforward rhetorical question, but it is obvious answer is, ‘the local church, of course!’ But the answer does not easily trip off the tongue. Many that I have asked to the question to shrug their shoulders and, with a twisted face, turn around, nod and whisper, ‘What are they doing then, if not the right answer, thus acknowledging that there is a problem.

As I have thought about the issue, I see three issues. Firstly – and I understand this is a to Steve’s point – that, unlike supermarkets, we at church can and do place obstacles in the path of the Kingdom-seeker. Here’s Steve’s case study: ‘If Fred hits hard times and starts looking around for a reason to exist, then, hopefully, he’ll think about maybe possibly popping in to that building he passes on the way to work – the one with the steeple and the big sign outside saying “Welcome”. So he plucks up enough courage to wander in on a Sabbath morning. What happens now? Does the man on the door take him up and down and tut-tut at the inappropriate attire? Does he “accidentally” sit in one of the chairs that “everyone” knows belong to the Smith family? Does Fred get identified by a man on the platform and hailed, in an ever-so-friendly way, as a “guy”? None of these things would happen were Fred to go looking for any other product or service. Which is my point if you’re a visitor and hailed, in an ever-so-friendly way, as a “guest”?

The second issue is the anomaly that at times it is easier to see the values of the Kingdom of Heaven in the ‘supermarket’ than in the church. Two examples of the secular practice of Kingdom values come to mind. A recent book by Joseph Michelli entitled The New Gold Standard outlines the Ritz-Carton-embedded culture of non-judgemental and generous service (see chapter 20 of this book). The hotel chain makes the claim that it is ‘the world’s gold standard’ in serving people. Shouldn’t that be the church’s claim? Ritz-Carton employees are proud of their organisation and its record of outstanding service that keeps its customers coming back for more. An example (and I choose this story because it is often in the small actions that a value is revealed) that Michelli relates is of a waitress who is asked by a girl in a family she is serving if they have a particular type of ice cream that doesn’t appear on the menu. The waitress, instead of just giving a smiling apology (which surely would be fully acceptable), says, ‘Let me see what I can do.’ She then asks another waiter to cover her tables while she pops round to an ice cream shop she knows, buys the right type, rushes back to the hotel kitchen, and emerges with the other desserts plus the ice cream the girl asks for. That is gold-standard service. In answer to Steve’s question about where to see the Kingdom of Heaven, dare the answer be, ‘At a Ritz-Carton hotel’?

The other example is the practices of people care that Nordstrom employees give to their customers. In reviewing the book, The Nordstrom Way, by Robert Spector and Patrick McCarthy, Tom Peters (a leadership guru) states that ‘Nobody does it better than Nordstrom’. A church reply should be, ‘That’s nonsense – we practise people care better than anyone!’ After all, this is where the Kingdom values are to be seen.

Where can you go to see the Kingdom of God?

In this excerpt of Values-led Lives, Pastor Llew Edwards gives us a case study to consider. Fred goes to church . . . and what does he find? Where is Fred to find the Kingdom of God? The answer he gives challenges us again – not so much about what we do, but about who we are.
Aberdaron work retreat for NEC youth

In February this year a group of ten volunteers spent the week at the Aberdaron Advent Camp to assist with work development. Youth came from all over the North England Conference (NEC) and were overseen in their work by Steve Bul and Adbur Daxamony, site manager and assistant manager. During the week, volunteer youth stripped two of the chalets of their current outer layer of wood before commencing the meticulous task of putting on the new outer layer. While few of the volunteers were expert labourers, each one learned new skills and how to use the various tools that were essential that week. While it may have taken longer than a professional work crew, because the work was done on a voluntary basis it allowed for a huge saving of vital funds for the NEC, and it also gave the youth a sense of ownership of the site.

Throughout the week there was a ‘mixed bag’ of weather, with most of the days being decent with some rain mixed in. Meals were cooked on a rotational basis and everyone helped. Evenings were spent having worship together, followed by socialising, which included playing games. Although it was not intentionally planned as a ‘spiritual’ retreat, the remote location, the fact of being away from normal daily routine and city life, the camaraderie, and the spiritual encouragement of others all meant that the week became a wonderful spiritual blessing for those who attended.

Though the site is closed at the moment during the COVID-19 crisis, we look forward to when it will reopen and we can enjoy the beauty of the Aberdaron area once again.

PASTOR ADAM RAMDIN (NEC YOUTH DIRECTOR)

Special Needs Camp, Aberdaron 2020

Please note that our mission to the church and many Adventist friends has had to be cancelled this year because of the coronavirus. We are keen to ensure that we can reassure disappointed campers and their carers that next year’s camp, 11-18 July, will run. In order to do that we will need to have a list of volunteers who have agreed that they will give their time to support this mission next year. It is a long way ahead, but please could you look forward with us to continuing this work? We have various roles, but basically our volunteers support our campers for the week, helping them to have a good holiday while learning more about a relationship with Jesus. If you would like to spend the week on the Aberdaron camp site, supporting our campers, please contact us via our website: specialneedscamp.org.uk.

JOY BUSSIEY

Former Stanborough School pupil appointed a deputy lieutenant for West Midlands

Congratulations to Christine Arthur, who has recently been appointed as a deputy lieutenant for the West Midlands. Christine was raised in Watford, attending Stanborough School and nearby Parmiters School. After a gap year at Newbold College, she studied at the University of Birmingham, reading English and Communication, leading to a very successful career in public relations.

Christine has always appreciated the role of teachers at Stanborough School and Newbold College for establishing a good launch pad for her career. Currently she serves as Managing Director for the McCann Central group in Solihull.

The role of a deputy lieutenant includes arranging visits by members of the royal family and escorting royal visitors, representing the Queen as requested and assessing nominations for honour.

Married to Nicholas Davis of Fieldings Auctioneers, Stourbridge (who frequently appears on the BBC’s Flog It programme), they are blessed with two sons, Owen and Rhys. Her parents, John and Ruth Arthur, live in Scotland. Her father, John, once served as President of the British Union Conference, and continues to champion the work of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, after serving as ADRA-Trans Europe Director from 1989 to 2001.

Christine, with her parents, John and Ruth Arthur
REFLECTIONS

As supplied, errors and omissions excepted.

A ‘locked-down’ pastor, yet not ‘locked out’ of ministry

Where I wiped my hands on my jeans and glanced at the time. Is that the time already? I was headed to Spar to collect the grocery parcels ready for delivery to isolated customers. On my way I wanted to deliver a load of firewood to a needy family who I know will struggle to make ends meet this month. As I drove down the road I mused to myself, ‘Is that the time already?’. However, the devil was to try and thwart our plans. With 10 days to go, we realised that our chosen speaker for the morning was furloughed, so whom to call? Thankfully, Viv and Jonathan both agreed to fit the talks in to their busy schedules. However, Viv’s mother came to the rescue, and her garden became the ‘pulpit’ on the morning.

As France, Portugal and even Australia; How they were personally feeling about it. Thankfully this last question revealed that a lot were confident of God’s leading and care, even if they were a bit worried about how it might impact them and their families.

If your church would like to get involved in the BUC ‘Restoration’ convalescence project, please contact us at: splattmcdonald@adventist.uk. Following the worship, there was breakout time for a chat. For the first time ever, Robin Beamish hosted a live YouTube worship stream in the afternoon. The chat screen on Zoom was used to encourage people to share how they had been helping out in the community, listing Bible texts that mean a lot to them at this time, and sharing thanks and prayer requests.

As France, Portugal and even Australia;

An estimated 120 people were involved in the community, along with counselling (call Enoch Kanagaraj on 07702 566667 for meals, household items, and care packages; if living outside Watford, call Councillor Rabbi Martins on 07494 450325 for counselling support). Phase 2 will extend provision of many of these services across London using local hubs to store needed items; and phase 3 will involve a health retnat once the lockdown has been eased. Limited funding is being secured to assist individuals who may require some financial support. If this is an area of need for you, or someone you know, please email Sharon Platt-McDonald at splattmcdonald@adventist.uk. If your church would like to get involved in the BUC ‘Restoration’ convalescence project or become a hub for supporting local residents with shopping and household essentials, please make contact with Sharon Platt-McDonald on the email identified above.

Please keep this initiative in your prayers as we seek to support those in need during these challenging times.

The chat screen on Zoom was used to encourage people to share how they had been helping out in the community, listing Bible texts that mean a lot to them at this time, and sharing thanks and prayer requests.

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In their PowerPoint message, Viv and Jon summarised the question, ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ with the following points:

1. Jesus would worship at home.
2. Jesus would remember God’s promises and use them to encourage others.
3. Jesus would heal people.
4. Jesus would reach out and help people in practical ways.
5. Jesus would make good use of His time.

The concert can be viewed on the following link:

https://youtu.be/DQEVidL5R7E. The concert can be viewed on the following link:

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Almost home

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The stamps of minds are different. All do not understand expressions and statements alike. Some understand the statements of the Scriptures to suit their own particular minds and cases. Prepossessions, prejudices, and passions have a strong influence to darken the understanding and confuse the mind even in reading the words of Holy Writ.”

( Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 20)

‘The Bible is but yet dimly understood. A life-long prayerful study of its sacred revelations will leave still much unexplained. It is the deep movings of the Spirit of God that is needed to operate upon the heart to mould character, to open the communication between God and man, before the deep truths will be unravelled. Man has to learn himself before God can do great things for him. The little knowledge imparted might be a hundredfold greater if the mind and character were balanced by the holy enlightenment of the Spirit of God. Altogether too little meekness and humility are brought into the work of searching for the truth as for hidden treasures, and if the truth were taught as it is in Jesus, there would be a hundredfold greater power, and it would be a converting power upon man's human heart, but everything is so mingled with self that the wisdom from above cannot be imparted.’

( Ellen G. White, Letter 37, 1887 – quoted in Manuscript Releases, vol. 15, p. 28)

‘It is essential to give up the illusion that we come to the biblical text as innocent, objective, impartial, culture-free investigators, for we are nothing of the kind. No, the spectacles through which we look at the Bible have cultural lenses. And the mind with which we think about the Bible, however open we keep it, is not empty. On the contrary, it is filled with cultural prejudices. So, though we cannot altogether rid ourselves of our cultural inheritance, we should be aware of our cultural bias.’

( John Scott, The Contemporary Christian, 1992)
‘Binge Jesus’? Those are strange words on that bloke’s polo shirt, I thought to myself. I’ve heard of ‘try Jesus’, ‘take Jesus’, and ‘love Jesus’. But ‘Binge Jesus’ – what does that mean?

It seems that some folks will spend 24 hours, 36 hours, or a whole weekend watching multiple episodes of a television series: for example, via Netflix. ‘Not sure that’s the healthiest activity,’ I mutter to my sanctimonious self. Yet, come to think of it, I have watched three episodes in a row of my favourite series. But after three I can safely say I’m done in; the eyes glaze over and I’m out like a light. I don’t know how these young folks do it!

You probably noticed long before I did that there’s a series on the go at the moment called The Chosen. Claiming to be the first ever multi-season series based on the true stories of the gospels, over the last few weeks, I’ve been taking a look at it. I like what I see.

For a start, it is different from the classic portrayals of Jesus in such films as Jesus of Nazareth or The Passion of the Christ. Those centre on the character and personality of Christ, and tell His story. The Chosen, from what I see so far, tells the Gospel story through the eyes of those Jesus connected with: Simon Peter, James, Matthew, Nicodemus and Mary Magdalene, for example. The series creator, Dallas Jenkins, intentionally ensures that all the disciples are portrayed effectively. To do this he has to give a picture of the social, economic, religious and political world they lived in, which he does well.

Hands up! As with any film on the life of Christ, there’s always going to have to be some ‘sanctified imagination’. There is with The Chosen. But it’s good and honest imagination, which punches through the beauty and power of the Gospel.

In one scene, Nicodemus, in his role as a rabbi, is called on to help Mary Magdalene, who is portrayed as cripplingly possessed by a demon. Reluctantly, Nicodemus agrees to help — as a last resort. We see him timidly approaching Mary’s house, entering it, and trying in vain to heal her. He is not successful, and leaves full of self-doubt, with Mary still desperately ill.

A few days later Nicodemus meets Mary in the marketplace, and is surprised to find her fit and well — healed! As his self-doubt disappears, his face lights up, and Mary notices. She smiles graciously at him, but with words that make no sense to him at all.

‘It was someone else, Nicodemus.’

Mary had met Jesus . . . I’m gripped, and I want to watch more.

‘Binge Jesus’ — a strange title for an evangelism effort, but that’s what this series is: nothing less. It seems like the folks behind this series are pushing it right now, and for good reason, I say. In the lockdown, binge Jesus?

Like!

To find out more about The Chosen, go to: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC80DFXwHrOJKqkP4paKeig