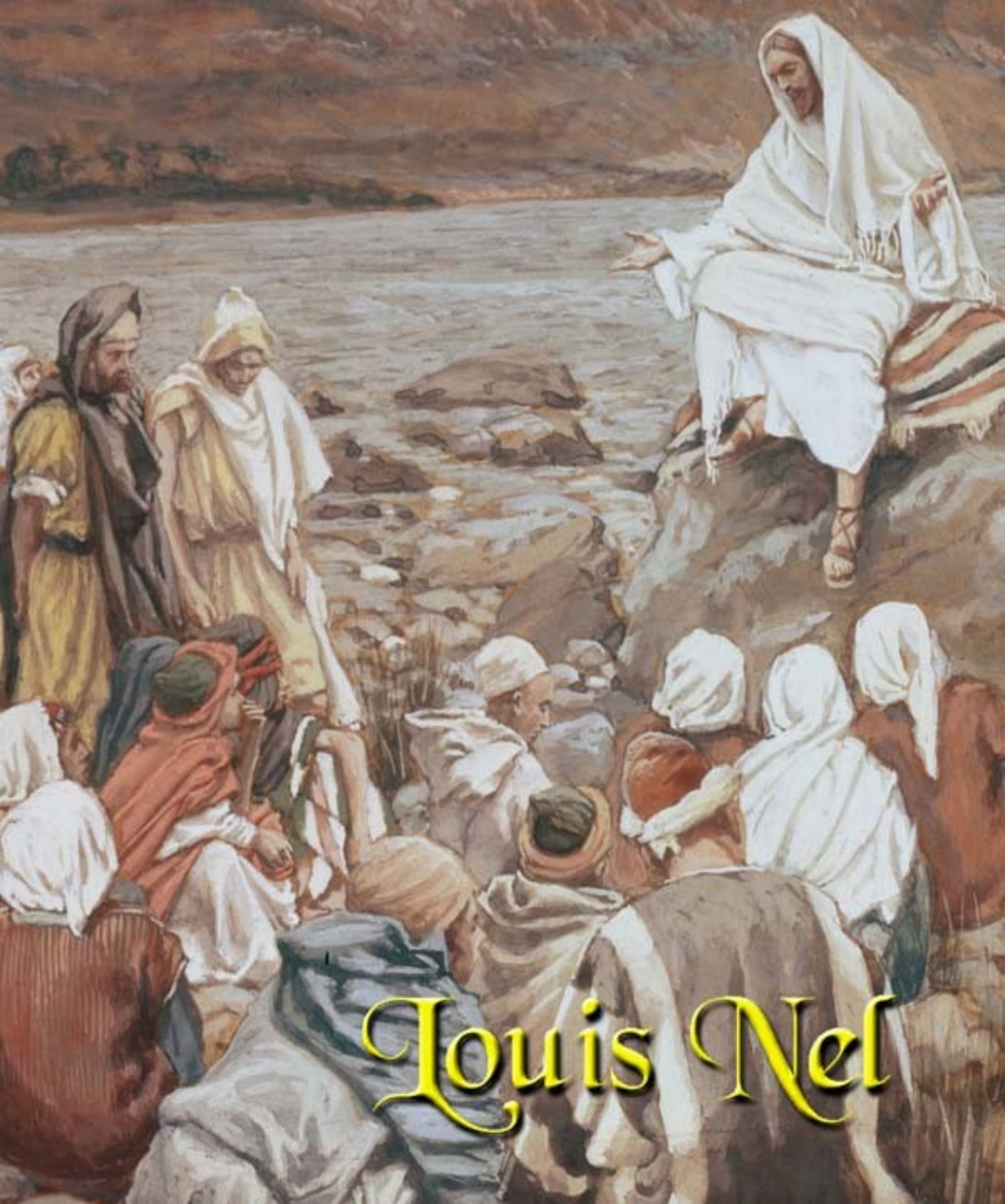


Bible Stories



Louis Nel

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In The Beginning

Genesis 1:1-11

This is the very first chapter of a book about some of the true stories from the Bible. Maybe we should start this book by looking at the beginning of it all - where do we come from? Where do all the animals and plants come from? And the stars and sun and moon and our beautiful earth?

Let's start at the very beginning - a very good place to start! The very first words in the Bible read like this: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

The question many people ask, is: “When was this beginning that the Bible tells us about?” Some people say that it was 6000 years ago. Others say 15 billion years ago. We simply do not know - all we know for sure, is that God was already there before there was anything. We also know that God made everything out of nothing.

How did this all happen? We can only guess, because the Bible does not give us all the details - it only gives us a very broad outline. But if I use my imagination, I think this is about how it happened:

One day God called all His angels

together and said to them: “I am going to create something very big and beautiful. I want to create living beings with a will of their own, and I want to see if they would still worship Me if they have the choice to do so. But first I will make them a place where they can live.”

So God started making the universe - a mighty big space. He created gas that emitted a great light. These gas particles started clustering together until they formed huge fiery balls that we today know as stars. Then He grouped these stars together in huge bunches, called galaxies.

But one galaxy was very special - He called it the Milky Way. One of the stars in the Milky Way had some planets circling around it. And then God made one of these planets extra special - He placed it in exactly the right position from the sun so that it would not be too hot or too cold. He gave it an atmosphere of life giving oxygen and other gasses. He put water in the oceans and rivers and lakes. And then He started forming life on this planet - first plants. He made a great variety of plants, from tiny little algae to huge trees. He made plants that would grow in jungles, He made savannah

and grasslands and He even made plants that grow in the desert.

God made plants that would be food for different kinds of animals. Some plants gave shade when the sun was very hot and others would give shelter for birds and other animals to sleep in. Some plants were created with beautiful flowers to make the earth even more beautiful. Others were created specially to bear fruit for man to eat.

When God was satisfied that everything was just perfect, He started creating the animals - small ones and large ones;

animals that live on land and animals that live in the sea. He even made animals that live in the air! He made tiny insects and huge elephants. He made tiny mice and tall giraffes. He made timid bunnies and ferocious lions and leopards. He made tiny, colourful fishes and huge whales and dolphins. Each animal got his very special place where he fits in. And each animal that God created had his own task in life.

And then, when everything was just perfect, the creation was ready for the prime of God's creation - man. Very carefully God took some of the earth and He

formed Man with His own hands. He called him Adam. But God decided that it was not good for Adam to be alone - he needed a mate. So one night, while Adam was asleep, He took one of Adam's ribs and created a woman from this, and He called her Eve.

God gave Adam and Eve the most beautiful place on earth to live in - it was a luscious garden with three rivers running through it and all the most beautiful plants. God called the garden Eden. He put them in charge of all the plants and animals. God told Adam that He wanted them to manage the creation.

The first task that God gave Adam, was to give all the animals names. The one with the dangerous teeth he called a lion, and the huge guy with the loooong nose and humoungous ears he named Elephant. The slow creature with his house on his back he named: Tortoise. I think Adam had the most wonderful work, to give names to hundreds of different animals. “You, little naughty guy up in the brances, I will call you Monkey, and you with the long neck will from now on be known as Giraffe. And what would you like to be called? OK, if you don’t say

anything, I will just call you Rabbit!”

Adam and Eve were totally different from any of the other things that God created - they could think for themselves and make choices. They had a will of their own. They could even decide for themselves if they wanted to worship God or not.

And God was very pleased with His handiwork - His creation was perfect. God sometimes came down from heaven and then He spent time with Adam and Eve, and He talked to them. They were very happy and they liked living in God’s garden and they liked

talking to God.

But somewhere in this beautiful garden there was a very dangerous snake. Next time I will tell you about this horrible creature.

What did we learn today?

The first and most important lesson is that God created everything. Who is this God we are talking about? The Trinity. In the second verse of Genesis 1 we read that the Spirit of God moved over the waters. That refers to the Holy Spirit. In John 1:3 we read that Jesus was the One Who created everything. Jesus part of

the Trinity, and He is God.

The second thing we learn is that the universe did not just happen by chance, but that God planned it carefully and created it over a long period of time. And the same goes for all the plants and animals on earth. The theory of evolution, that everything evolved from a single cell is total nonsense. God created! And also that humans evolved from some ape-like animal - that is pure speculation. God created humans.

The third lesson that we learn is that God gave Adam the task to manage His creation. He had to

look after it and care for it. As descendants of Adam, it is still our task today. We must take good care of everything that God had made. We must not destroy or abuse God's wonderful creation!

But maybe the most important thing that we learn is that God is great and almighty. We must love and obey and worship Him and talk to Him.

Snake in Paradise

Genesis 3:1-13

God created a perfect heaven and earth. Out of nothing He created the stars and the sun and moon and the earth. Then He created the plants and animal, and when everything was absolutely perfect, He created two people, Adam and Eve.

God made a home for them in the most beautiful garden, and He asked them to look after the garden - to manage the garden and all the animals and plants and everything that He made. God gave these two people a free

will to decide what they wanted to do. They could choose if they wanted to do what God asked them to do or not.

God gave Adam and Eve only one rule to obey. He told them that they could pick fruit from any of the beautiful fruit trees in the garden. There were succulent grapes and peaches and apples and bananas. But there was one rule: in the middle of the garden there were two trees - the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. God said to Adam and Eve: “Don’t eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.”

“But why Lord? Why can’t we eat

those fruit?”

“Because I don’t want you to eat it. If you eat those fruit, you will certainly die!”

One day Eve was walking alone through the garden. She was in the middle of the garden near the tree of knowledge - the tree that God told her not to eat, when suddenly she heard a voice calling her: “Eve....” She was surprised, because there were no other people, only her and Adam.

Then she heard it again: “Eve!”

“Who is that?” She looked around, but there was nobody. Then she saw the snake, and to

her big surprise the snake started talking to her. “I didn’t know that snakes could talk?”

“Oh, but I am a very special snake! Eve, I have a question for you: Is it true that God told you that you could not eat from all the fruit trees in the garden?”

“God told us that we could eat any of the fruit except from that one tree, the tree of knowledge.”

“So it is true after all. Have you ever wondered why God does not want you to eat those fruit?”

“No, God told us that it was dangerous - we would die if we eat it.”

“Oh, do you really believe that? That is not true - God is scared that if you eat those lovely fruit, then you will get knowledge, and you will know just as much as He knows. The fruit from that tree is not dangerous - it is actually very good. Come on, try it!”

“Oh, I don’t know, God said.....”

“Come on Eve, forget what God said - just one bite.....”

Eve took the fruit from the snake and she tasted it. It was different from anything else she ever tasted - it was very good to eat. “I like it! It is beautiful!”

“Have some more - there is more

than enough. And take some along for Adam - he will enjoy them!”

What Eve did not know, is that this was not really a snake - this was actually Satan who disguised himself as a snake. He told her a lot of lies about God, and she believed him. She took the fruit to Adam and she told him that this was the fruit that God said was so dangerous. Adam saw that nothing happened to Eve and he also ate the forbidden fruit.

Suddenly their eyes opened and they realised that they were naked. This did not bother them before they had the fruit, but now

suddenly they felt terrible about it. So they made clothes for themselves from fig leaves.

That evening God came to talk to them. When Adam saw God coming, he quickly took Eve and they went hiding behind a bush. They were scared because they felt very guilty about the thing that they did. God called them: “Adam, Eve, where are you?”

Eventually Adam answered: “Here we are Lord.....”

“Why are you hiding from Me?”

“I heard You coming Lord, and I got scared because I am naked! Then I decided to hide from You.”

“But Adam, that is very strange, this did not bother you before - how did you suddenly come to realise after all these years that you are naked? You didn’t perhaps eat from that tree that I told you not to eat?”

“Lord, it is all Eve’s fault! That woman that You gave me - it is she that gave me the fruit to eat. I am innocent Lord, really!”

“Eve, what have you done? You know that it was wrong to eat that fruit!”

“No Lord, I am innocent, really! It was not my fault - it was the snake. He was the one that

deceived me. He gave me the fruit and he told me that it was harmless. It wasn't me Lord!"

Next time we will see what happened to Adam and Eve. Did God let them die because of their sin like He said would happen to them? Or did He have mercy on them?

In the time of the Old Testament God gave the Israelites many laws to obey. But when Jesus came, He said: "Forget about all those laws. There is just one thing that is very important: love God and love other people." That is all He wants us to do. What is so difficult about that?

Today we say about Adam and Eve: “What was so difficult about not eating one certain fruit?” But just like them, it is also só hard to obey this one law God gave us. It is much more fun to say bad things about somebody or to hurt someone. It is boring to help someone or to say nice things about her.

If you love God, it means that you will do things for Him. You will go to church and you will tell other people about Him. It is so much easier and much more fun if we do not have to do those things.

God gave us one law only - come let us obey Him and do what He

asked us to do!

Paradise Lost

Genesis 3:14-24

We heard how God created the universe and the first two people, Adam and Eve, and about the wonderful garden that God gave them to live in. He was there with them, and He talked to them. They had a wonderful relationship. But then the sad thing happened when Eve listened to the devil. She disobeyed God and broke the only rule that God gave them to keep. She also gave Adam some of the forbidden fruit, and he took it and disobeyed God.

That evening God came down from heaven to be with Adam and Eve, but they were scared of Him because they knew that they did wrong, so they were hiding from God. And when God asked them what they did, Adam said that it was all Eve's fault, because she was the one who gave him the fruit. And Eve said that she was innocent, because it was the snake that deceived her.

God knew that He had to take drastic measures. In the beginning He told them that if they disobeyed Him, they would surely die. But God felt sorry for them and He decided not to kill

them, but He could no longer let them live in this beautiful garden.

God cursed the snake because he tempted Eve with the forbidden fruit. He would lose his legs, he would crawl on his belly and everybody would hate him. Today, many thousands of years later, most people still hate snakes!

To Eve, God said that she would bear children and that every childbirth would be very painful. But God also gave her a promise: her offspring would one day crush the head of the snake. The snake would bite him in the heel, but that would be too late for the

snake.

What does that mean? Does it mean that somebody would one day kill all the snakes? No! Remember, the “snake” that we are talking about is not really a snake – it is Satan who disguised himself as a snake. God's promise to Eve is that one day the Messiah, Jesus would be born. Satan would fight against Him and try to destroy Him. But Jesus would crush the head of Satan.

Exactly that happened when Jesus was crucified. Satan thought that this was the end of Jesus when He died on the cross.

But he forgot that God is much greater, and that Jesus would raise from the dead. Satan was powerful, but Jesus broke his power. One day Satan will be completely destroyed.

The God turned to Adam. His carefree life in the beautiful garden was over. From now on he would have to work hard to make a living. It would not be easy, because the world outside this garden was full of weeds.

After this, God told them to leave His beautiful garden. They would never be able to come back. And to make sure that they would stay out, He told an angel to guard the

entrance to the garden with a flaming sword in his hand. Nobody would get past him. In the garden there was still the tree of everlasting life, and God did not want anybody to eat the fruit of that tree, because that would mean that they would never die.

And so God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden. But He did not send them empty-handed. God still loved them and cared for them, even though they disobeyed Him. He gave them a second chance. He made them a set of clothes from animal skins and God gave this to Adam and Eve to wear. Outside the garden

everything was totally different.

Shortly after they left, Eve became pregnant. It was not easy, because when the time came for the baby to be born, Eve got these terrible pains. She thought she was going to die! Her first child was born, and they called him Cain. Eve fell pregnant again, and another boy was born – they called him Abel. Now Adam and Eve had a family, and Adam had to care for them. He had to give them food, but in the hard way Adam found out that this was not an easy task. They no longer lived in the lovely garden where there was plenty of

fruit to eat. Adam now had to produce their own food. He had to plant seeds to grow plants that they could eat. But there were weeds that strangled his plants. And there were all sorts of insects that ate up his crops. It was not easy!

Today we learn a few very valuable lessons from this story of the first two people. The first lesson we learn is that God really wants to give us the very best. He gave Adam and Eve the best they could ever hope for. God gave them the perfect garden to live in. They did not even have to work for their living or food – everything

was there. All God wanted from them was to obey Him and do what He asked them to do. He wanted them to love Him.

God also wants to give us the very best. All He is asking from us is that we love Him with all our hearts and do what He asks us to do. Unfortunately it is not all that simple, because Satan is not dead yet, and he is tempting us every day to do exactly the opposite of what God asks from us. This is called sin.

What does sin do to our lives? Adam and Eve were hiding from God when they sinned. Sin separated them from God. Today

exactly the same thing happens to us. When we sin, it separates us from God. When you do the wrong things, your good relationship with God is just not the same any more. If I say to you: “You are an ugly old woman!” what happens? I am sinning against you, and you will not feel good about this. Will you invite me to come and visit you after that? No, I don't think so! Our relationship is not the same any more. In the same way we ruin our relationship with God when we sin against Him.

Nothing was ever the same again after Adam and Eve sinned

against God. Their lives in God's presence in paradise was lost for ever. Today we still bear the consequences of their sin. Like Adam we must still work hard to stay alive. And women still bear children in great pain. But the question is if everything is indeed lost for ever?

And the answer is: "No!" Everything is not quite lost. God gave Adam and Eve their own free will, and He hoped so much that they would love and obey Him. But then God saw that this was impossible because people are not angels.

Then God made a new plan so

that people could still live in this wonderful paradise. He sent His only Son, Jesus to come and pay for all our sins. All He asks from us is that we must believe in Jesus. We must, in other words, have a relationship with Him. God's promise is that in this life it may be impossible for us to get back to paradise, because we simply cannot stop sinning against God. But the moment we die, the angel with the fiery sword that guards the entrance to paradise, steps aside and lets us in so that we could live with God like Adam and Eve lived with Him in those first years in Eden before

they sinned.

I am so much looking forward to that wonderful day when I can enter the gates to paradise!

Where is your Brother?

The Story of Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:1-12

Today we come to the last part of our story of the beginning of mankind. Just to recap: over the past few weeks we learned about the origin of everything – how the Almighty God created the heaven and the earth out of nothing. And when everything was finished, He created the very best part of His whole creation – His masterpiece: MAN.

God gave them everything that they ever needed, and He even spent quality time with them in

their beautiful garden. But they decided to listen to Satan instead of God. Then God had to chase them out of Paradise before they destroyed everything.

Adam and Eve set up their new home somewhere in the East. They had a baby, and they called him Cain. Then Eve had another baby, and they called him Abel. The two brothers grew up, and Adam showed them how to farm so that they could produce food for themselves to eat.

Cain decided that he liked planting things and see them grow and produce food. He learned to choose the right kind of

seeds to grow wheat and all sorts of vegetables. It was not easy, because the insects and weed destroyed his crops. But Cain worked hard and he became a good farmer, and he could produce enough food for their family to stay alive.

His younger brother Abel did not really like working with the soil. He loved animals. So eventually he decided to start farming with animals. He caught some wild sheep, and he tamed them. Abel was very proud of himself, and he loved what he was doing. These wild sheep started multiplying, and it was not long before he had

a whole herd of sheep. He could cut off their wool and use it to make them clothes. But also the meat of these animals were very good to eat.

Adam and Eve sinned against God, and God chased them out of the garden. But they did not completely forget about God. And of course God did not forget about them either. Adam and Eve told their two sons about God, and they taught them that God gave them everything that they had. They had to be thankful for everything that God gave them. They taught their sons that you had to give back something to

God to say thank you. They thought that a proper way to do it, was to make an offering.

And so one day Abel saw that his herd of sheep was really growing nicely. There were plenty of new little lambs. And Abel was thinking to himself: “Wow, things are really going well for me. I want to give some of my produce to God to thank Him!” So he took his very best lamb and he offered it to God, and he said: “Thank you God, that You are so good to me!”

And God was pleased when He saw that Abel was really honest in his thanksgiving.

Cain's crops were also doing well. For the first time he was winning the battle against insects and weeds, and he had lots of healthy vegetables and wheat. Adam told Cain that he had to thank God for his crops that were growing well. "Yes Dad....." Cain said. His crops were growing so well, and he worked hard to get them growing – why would he give his hard work to God? But Cain had an obligation to God, and he decided to make an offering anyway. He did not really want to do it, but he did it because he had to.

Cain built an altar, put some

wheat and vegetables on it and burned it. “This is for You God!” he said. “Thank you!”

Cain's heart was not in this offering. He did not really want to do it, and God saw that. God did not like Cain's attitude. Cain realised that God was very pleased with his brother's offering, but he was not pleased with his own offering. And Cain was jealous of his brother. He was angry. One day God asked Cain: “Why are you so angry? Be careful Cain – your anger could lead to terrible things!”

But Cain did not listen to God. One day he called his brother:

“Let's go for a walk,” he told him. And the two of them walked out into the field. Cain hated his brother, and he wanted to get rid of him. So when they were far away from the house, Cain suddenly struck his brother and killed him.

When Cain got back home, Adam asked him: “Where is Abel?”

“How must I know? He must be somewhere out there.....”

Later that day God asked him the same question. Cain got angry with God: “I don't know! I am not my brother's babysitter! He can take care of himself – I don't take

care of him!”

Then God asked Cain: “What have you done, Cain? I saw you killing your brother. That was a terrible thing you did.” Then God told Cain: “I will no longer let your crops grow. Whatever you plant will not grow – it will be cursed.”

Was that the end of the Paradise story? What a terrible way to end our story! But no, it was not quite the end: God gave Adam and Eve another baby, and they called him Seth. Adam was already 130 years old when Seth was born. This little boy grew up and learned to love God. He got married and they had many

children. He had a long and fruitful life, and he became 912 years old.

This was a strange story. But how does it affect us today? Is it just a story from the distant past? No, indeed not. God put this story in the Bible so that we can learn from it today.

The one very valuable lesson that we learn, is NOT only that I must not kill my brother. But it is rather that I must really go and think why I am serving God. Why do I go to church? Why do I go to Simunye ku Jesu on Saturdays? Why do I read my Bible? Why do I pray? Why do I give my money to

the church?

Do I do these things because somebody told me to do it? Do I do it because I am scared that if I do not read my Bible or go to church, then God is going to punish me?

What did Cain do? Adam told him that he had to thank God, and he gave an offering because he was forced to do it.

And what about Abel? He said: "Thankyou that You gave me all these things God. I want to give You something to show You how much I appreciate it."

I tell people about God every

week because I love doing things for God. He was só good to me, and I want to thank Him with all of my heart. The question is: what is your attitude? Do you do things for God because you have to, or do you do it because you really want to?

Noah and his Big Ship

Genesis 6:6-8:22

In the beginning of time, many thousands of years ago, the people of the earth became very bad. They did all the most horrible things that you could dream of. Violence was an every day thing. Corruption was something that everybody indulged in. In general: people were rotten! God looked at the people, and He became very sad, because He personally made everything and everybody good. But now the people were busy messing up everything that He made so perfect.

Then God decided that He was going to bring an end to it all. He was going to wipe the people off the face of the earth. God was going to destroy the earth and everything on it.

But there was one man that was still honouring God, his name was Noah. He loved God and he worshipped Him. He had a true relationship with God and he was doing what God wanted him to do.

God did not forget about Noah. He decided that for the sake of this one man that still loved Him, He would not destroy the earth completely. Then God spoke to

Noah and He told him that He was going to destroy all the people and wipe them off the face of the earth. But He was going to save Noah and his family.

In order to save him, God gave Noah a huge task: He instructed him to build a ship. This was no ordinary little boat, but a huge ship, because it was not only Noah and his family that were to go into the ship, but also a large number of animals. God gave Noah accurate instructions of exactly how this ship had to be built.

Noah did not quite understand why he had to build a ship. Then

God explained to him that He was going to send a massive storm with lots and lots of rain, so that the whole earth would be flooded and everything on it would drown. Noah's task was to save a pair of every kind of animal on earth, so that they would continue existing on earth after the flood. He also had to take enough food for his family and the animals so that they could stay alive for a long time.

Noah obeyed God, and he started building his massive ship on dry land. Very soon the people walking past Noah, saw the framework of the ship taking

place, and they wondered what the old man was building. At that stage Noah was not quite a young man any more - he was already six hundred years old! But he was still fit enough to build his ship. After a few months, the framework started looking like the shape of a ship, and every day people would come looking at this strange thing Noah was building.

“Hey Noah, what are you building?”

“A ship!” And everybody would laugh till the tears rolled down their cheeks.

“Noah, did you perhaps notice

that there is no water around here? This is a desert! Ships don't sail in the desert, you know!" They all thought that he had lost his marbles. Old age caught up with him.

But Noah carried on building, because he trusted God. He told the people that God was going to destroy the earth, but they just laughed at him.

After a long time Noah eventually finished his huge task. He stood there, admiring his massive ship. But Noah also wondered how he was going to get all the wild animals to go into the ship?

Then God once again spoke to Noah. He told Noah that he and his family had to go into this ship, because the rain was going to start coming down in 7 days time. Then Noah started wondering about the animals - God told him to save a pair of each kind of animal in the world. How was he going to fetch elephants and lions and buffalo and hippo and the thousands of different animals, all in 7 days time? It would take him years to find all the animals.

But God is almighty. He had already sent all the different kinds of animals on their way. The next thing that Noah saw, was all the

different animals, all walking on their own directly to the ship. There was a huge door on the side of the ship, and all the animals walked peacefully through the door into the ship. Noah stood there watching in amazement as a pair of elephant, rhinoceros, giraffe, tiger, lion, leopard, impala, ostrich, eland, cows, goats, donkeys, sheep etc. paraded into his ship.

The people came from all over to see this spectacle. And they laughed at Noah and told him that he had gone totally mad. Where did he think his ship was going to sail? There was still no water.

On the seventh day it started raining. Noah and his wife and children went into the ship, and God Himself sealed the door behind them. It rained and rained like nobody had ever seen before. People took shelter, but after a while their homes became flooded. The water started rising rapidly all over. People started panicking and they ran to Noah's ship and pleaded with him to take them in. But Noah couldn't, because God sealed the ship. All over the world the people started drowning. Some ran to the mountains, but the water rose so high that even the mountains

disappeared under the flood. Everybody on earth died, except for Noah and his family and the animals in his ship. For forty days and nights on end it rained.

For five months the ship floated before the water started subsiding. Then the ship landed on the mountain called Ararat. But still they were surrounded with water. Just more than a year after the rain started falling, God told Noah that he could safely leave the ship, and they stepped out on dry land.

Noah built an altar, and he made an offering to God to say thankyou that God saved them.

Then God said to Noah that He would never let the same thing happen to the earth again. And He put a rainbow in the sky to remind people ever after about His promise.

Today, when we see a rainbow in the sky, it makes us think about the wonderful love of God. It makes us think of the way He saved Noah, and His promise that the earth would never see such a flood again.

But it also reminds us of how God came to save you and me. Just like the earth was destroyed because of the sins of the people, Jesus was also destroyed, killed,

crucified because of the sins of people. But like Noah was saved because he believed in God, we are also saved because we believe in Jesus. He paid for all our sins. All He asks from us is to believe in Jesus. What does that mean? To believe in Jesus means to have a living relationship with Him like you have a living relationship with the person that you love very much.

The Story of Abraham

Genesis 11:27-12:9

Many, many years ago, 3000 BC, about 5000 years ago, just a few years after Noah died, a little boy was born in the city of Ur in Babylonia. His father Tera called him Abraham. Little Abraham grew up and when he was a young man, he fell in love and married the most beautiful girl called Sara. But there was a problem: they never had any children, and Abraham was very worried. There would be nobody to carry his family name.

One day old Tera, Abraham's

father decided that he wanted to pack up and move to Canaan. But maybe he got a bit lost, and he landed in Haran, where they settled. And there, after many years Tera died at the ripe old age of 205 years.

One day God spoke to Abraham. God told him that He wanted him to pack up and move to a new country. God told Abraham that He would show him where to go. But God also made a promise to Abraham: He would make him a great nation and He would bless him. God said that Abraham would have many, many grandchildren. Abraham asked

God how it would be possible? By this time he was already an old man of seventy five years old! God just told him to be patient. Abraham waited and waited very patiently. But nothing happened. All he knew was that God made him a promise, that he would have children. And he knew that God never broke His promises. Abraham trusted God!

Abraham did what God told him to do. He and his beautiful wife Sara packed up everything they had and they started going south. They also took their young nephew Lot with them, as well as all Abraham's slaves. They did

not even know where they were going, but they trusted God that He would show them the way.

After they had traveled almost 200 kilometers they came to a place called Shechem in the land of Canaan. There they pitched their camp. That night God spoke to Abraham: “I give this country to you and all your descendants,” He said to Abraham.

Abraham heard God’s promise to him. There were two things: God promised him that the whole country of Canaan would belong to him. But the second part of the promise was that there would be descendants. Descendants

meant that he and Sara would have children. Now there was a little problem. Remember, he was an old man of seventy five and his wife was also not a spring chicken any more. She was sixty five years old. A woman of her age simply does not have children!

But they still trusted God because God does not break His promises.

For Abraham it was 'n great experience when God spoke to him. He was overwhelmed by the wonderful promises that God made to him, so he built an altar for God on that place.

Abraham and Sara did not stay in Shechem. After a while they packed up again, moved south until they got to a town called Beth-el. They pitched their camp and stayed there for a while. Eventually Abraham packed up again and moved further south.

Why did Abraham keep moving? He was a rich man and he had lots of sheep, goats, cattle and camels. They needed grazing and Abraham had to keep moving to ensure that there was always enough grazing for all the animals. Abraham's nephew Lot who went with them, also had his animals and they also needed

grazing.

Eventually there were too many animals for the grazing and the young Lot's slaves started arguing with Abraham's slaves for the best grazing for their animals. Abraham realised that soon there would be big trouble among them if he did not make a plan. So he called Lot and suggested to him that maybe they should split before things started getting out of hand.

Lot agreed and he decided to move away with his animals to the fertile Jordan Valley. He went and stayed in one of the cities in that area called Sodom, a bad

city with bad people. Abraham settled in a dry place in the mountains called Hebron where he lived for many years.

One night Abraham was lying in his tent when suddenly he had a vision where he saw God. God said to him: “Don’t be afraid, Abraham. I will protect you and I will bless you.”

Then Abraham said: “Lord, You promised me children, but this has now become impossible. I am too old for children. Maybe I can adopt one of my slaves so that I can have descendants in that way.”

Then God said: “No Abraham, you will still have your very own children. Look up at the stars Abraham. Your descendants will be as many as the stars you see in the sky!”

Then God said to Abraham that He wanted to make a covenant between the two of them. That means that He will set up a contract. That night God told Abraham what the future held in stock for him and his children and grand children. One day his descendants will live in a foreign land for four hundred years. But after that they would come back to this country and God would

give them the whole of Canaan as their property.

This happened exactly as God told Abraham. Many years later Abraham's descendants lived in Egypt as slaves for 400 years. After that Moses took them to the land that God promised Abraham and God gave them the land as their property.

God always keeps His promises. He also made wonderful promises for me and you in the wonderful Book, the Bible. One of the promises is that He would forgive all our sins if we believe in Jesus. Another wonderful promise is that we will get everlasting life.

Another wonderful promise is that we will get a brand new body after we died and that we will live in heaven with God. There will be no more bad things, sin, pain, hunger, skebengas etc.

God promised us all these wonderful things. And the promises are not like the hollow promises of politicians. They are true and He will keep them.

But what about Abraham? Did God keep His promise about children? Abraham was already nearly 100 years old! It was totally impossible to have children! We will just have to wait till next time to see what happened.

Abraham and Isaac

Genesis 22:1-19

Last time we heard the story of Abraham. But we did not finish the story, because we heard that God made him a promise that he would have many descendants, and Abraham was already a man of over ninety years old, and still he and Sara did not have a child.

Abraham eventually thought that it would be impossible. But God just told him to be patient. Abraham waited and waited very patiently. But nothing happened. All he knew was that God made him a promise, that he would

have children. And he knew that God never broke His promises. Abraham trusted God!

Then one fine day, when Abraham was almost a hundred years old, and Sara was 90, she told her grey old husband: “Abraham! I think I am pregnant!”

Impossible! Such a thing can not happen! But with God absolutely nothing is impossible. And so, nine months later Abraham and Sara were the proud parents of little Isaac, their only child. Last time we said that God always keeps His promises. Once again He did just that!

A few years went by, and Isaac became a boy of ten or twelve years old.

And then one day Abraham heard a voice calling him: “Abraham!” He knew that this was God’s voice, so he answered: “Here I am Lord!”

God told Abraham that he must go to Moriah, and he must take his only son with him. Abraham was already 110 years old, but he was still willing to walk a long distance for God, because he loved God very much.

But then God told him why He wanted him to go to Moriah:

Abraham must go and offer his only son on a mountain. Abraham got a big fright. He had to wait 100 years to get a son, and now he must go and kill his son and burn him on a pile of wood. What do you think Abraham's answer was to that? Did he say: "No Lord, that is asking a little bit too much of me. I will pass this one!?" No, Abraham immediately started packing his donkeys to make this trip. He trusted God so much, that he was even willing to offer his only son if that was what God wanted.

Early the next morning Abraham got onto his donkey, and he took

Isaac and two slaves with him. For three days they travelled until they got to Moriah, and then Abraham saw the mountain where God told him to go. He left the slaves with the donkeys, and then he and his son Isaac started climbing the steep mountain. Isaac had to carry the bundle of wood up the steep slopes.

When they eventually got to the top, Abraham started building an altar out of stones. But Isaac was very puzzled. He watched many times how his father made offerings, and every time Abraham had a lamb which he slaughtered. The lamb was then

burnt as an offering to God. But this time there was no lamb. “Father” he asked, “we have wood and we have an altar and we have fire - but what about the lamb? Where are we going to find a lamb?”

Then Abraham said: “Don’t worry, God will provide a lamb for the offering.”

Then Abraham told his son to come and lie on the altar. He never told Isaac what was really going to happen. And Isaac trusted his old father. So Isaac climbed on top of the heap of firewood on the altar. Next Abraham took a rope and he tied

Isaac's hands and feet. "Father, what are you doing?" the young boy asked. He was now getting worried, because his father was doing very strange things. But Abraham just kept quiet - he was too scared to tell his son what he was going to do with him.

Young Isaac started to cry - he saw a strange look in his father's eyes. Then he saw his father taking a huge knife. Isaac wriggled to try and get free, but the ropes were too tight.

Abraham lifted the knife high into the air to kill his son. Why? God told him to do it, and he would do anything for God - even kill his

only son, if that is what God wanted. And then, just as his hands started coming down, he heard a voice calling him: “Abraham! Abraham!”

Abraham stopped, and he looked around. Who was this calling him? “Here I am!” he said. And thne he heard that the voice was coming out of the sky. Then he knew that it was God’s voice. “Don’t kill the boy!” God told Abraham. And then He said to him: “Now I know that you really trust Me. You were even willing to kill your only son for Me.”

Just then Abraham heard something in the bush behind

him. When he turned around, there was a sheep ram in the bush with his horns entangled in the branches. Then Abraham knew that God even provided the ram for the offering. He untied Isaac and they took the ram and slaughtered it and then they offered it to God.

Then God spoke to Abraham again. He said to Abraham that he would bless him, and that he would have many many grandchildren - like the stars of the heaven. But that was not all: God also said that all the nations on the earth would one day be blessed by Abraham's offspring.

What do you think God meant by that?

400 Years later a man called Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. They were all descendants of Abraham. Do you know how many of them there were? More than 3 million!

And out of them, many years later, the Messiah, Jesus Christ was born. He came to bring everlasting life, not only to the Jews, but to all the nations, Chinese, Europeans, Maories, Zulus - everybody!

But how do we get this everlasting life? By doing exactly

what Abraham did. He believed and he trusted God. We must believe in Jesus and trust Him with all our life. Abraham was a good man. He did many good things and he did what God asked him to do. Why? Because he was thankful to God. We must do the same: When we get this eternal life, we must live a good life and do what God wants us to do, to say thank you to God for giving us everlasting life.

Jacob's Ladder

Genesis 28

Abraham had a son called Isaac. Isaac had 2 sons - twins. They were called Jacob and Esau. The two brothers were always quarrelling. One day Jacob did a very bad thing. His father Isaac was already very old and blind, and Jacob knew that. He went to his father and he acted as if he was his brother Esau. He lied to his father, and then he stole his brother's birth right.

When Esau heard about this, he was furious, and he wanted to kill Jacob. So Isaac and his wife

decided that it was better if Jacob went away, so they sent him to a place called Haran. Isaac told Jacob to go and find himself a wife in Haran, because his mother came from there and she still had some relatives in that far country. Grandfather Abraham also came from Haran.

So Jacob packed his belongings and went off to get away from his angry brother. It was a long way, and he had to walk weeks on end to get there. The first evening when the sun was setting, Jacob had to find a place to sleep. So he booked into a five star hotel for the night. Really?

No, there was no hotel or any place to sleep, so he found himself a spot where the ground was not too hard. He found a nice flat rock which he used as a pillow. Jacob was very tired from the long walk and the hot sun, so he fell asleep as soon as it got dark.

And then something amazing happened: Jacob had the most wonderful dream. But this was no ordinary dream. It was actually God who put this dream in Jacob's head, because He wanted to tell Jacob something.

Jacob dreamed that he saw a stairway in the middle of

nowhere. He could not understand it, so he went closer, and then he saw to his amazement that this stairway was very, very high. It reached right up into the sky. Jacob looked up to where the stairs went, and then he saw that there were actually angels climbing up and down the stairs. But where were they going, and where did they come from?

Then Jacob suddenly realised that this stairway was reaching all the way, right into heaven. This was the most wonderful thing Jacob had ever seen and he was so overcome by this wonderful sight, that he did not even notice

that there was Somebody standing right next to him. It was only when this Person spoke to Jacob, that he got a big fright. Jacob wondered where this Person suddely came from? Who was He?

The Man then introduced Himself to Jacob: “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham and Isaac.” Maybe Jacob thought that his last day had arrived, because of all the bad things that he did to his brother. And also, he did not really worship God like he saw his father Isaac doing. He did not care about God! He was a bad boy, and he followed his own

mind. Was God here to punish him for all his sins?

But when God spoke again, Jacob could not believe his ears, because God did not scorn him, but He gave him a promise. God said to Jacob: “I will give to you and to your descendants this land on which you are lying.”

Maybe Jacob thought: “But why Lord? I really did not deserve this! At this very moment I am busy running away from this land! And I do not have any descendants. I do not even have a wife!”

But God had an answer ready for Jacob: “Your descendants will be

as numerous as the specks of dust on the earth. They will extend their territory in all directions, and through you and your descendants I will bless all the nations.”

Jacob did not understand this at all. How was this possible that he could have so many children and grandchildren? He had not even found himself a wife yet! And why would all the nations be blessed by his children?

What Jacob did not know, was that many, many years later, one of his great grandchildren would be born in that very same country that God promised him, in a little

town called Bethlehem. His Name was Jesus, and He was the One who came to save the world. Through Jesus millions and millions of people were blessed and received the most wonderful gift of all: Everlasting Life. The great blessing that Jesus gives, is that if you believe in Him, then God makes you His child.

But God still was not finished with Jacob. He told him: “Always remember, I will be with you and I will protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done all that I have promised you.”

What a wonderful promise! Jacob was feeling very sad and lonely that morning when he left his father's house, because he thought that he would never ever be able to come back, because his brother hated him for what he did, and he would kill him if he ever saw him again. But now God promised him that he would one day return to his country and his house.

Then suddenly Jacob woke up. His heart was going: "Boom! Boom! Boom!" He was scared, because he knew that God was right there. Maybe this was the gateway to heaven!

The next morning Jacob got up. He took the stone that was under his head and he poured olive oil on it and he made an altar for God out of it. Then he said to God: “Lord, if You keep your promise to me, then You will be my God, and I will worship and serve You!”

Do you think God did what He promised Jacob He would do?

Indeed God did! He gave Jacob a wife and children and many grandchildren. And some years later He brought Jacob back to his land and house. Jacob’s descendants are so many that it is impossible to count them, and

through him all the nations of the world are blessed today, just like God promised.

Do you think God keeps His promises? Of course He does! He did every thing that He promised Jacob, even though it looked totally impossible at the time.

Has God ever made you a promise?

God gave us a book full of promises: the Bible. To name just a few: John 3:16 - God loves us and gave us everlasting life. Isiah 1:18 - He takes all our sins away and cleans us. Romans 3:23 - even though we have all sinned,

God sets us free. Rom. 6:23 - through God's grace He gives us everlasting life if only we believe in Jesus.

There are many, many more like these. Read all about His promises in the Book, and take God on His promises.

Joseph the Dreamer

Genesis 37:1-11

When Jacob arrived in Haran, he fell madly in love with a beautiful girl named Rachel. Her father, Laban agreed that they could get married if Jacob would work for him for seven years. So for seven long years he worked for his bride. But when the time came for the wedding, Laban played a dirty trick on Jacob, and he gave Jacob her sister, Leah as his wife. Jacob only found out the next day that he got the wrong wife. He was furious, but Laban said that he could get Rachel as well if he worked for him for another seven

years.

A week later he got married for the second time, and now suddenly he had two wives. Rachel was the lovely one, and Jacob loved her very much. But he did not really love Leah, maybe because she was not so pretty.

Eventually Leah had a baby, a son, but Rachel just could not fall pregnant. A year later Leah had another baby, and still Rachel had none. This went on year after year, until Leah had a whole bunch of children and Rachel still had no child. Rachel became very jealous of her sister Leah.

Eventually Rachel prayed very hard and pleaded with God to give her a baby. And God answered her prayer. When Rachel's baby son was born, she called him Joseph.

Because Jacob loved Rachel so much, Joseph became his favourite son, and he did much more for Joseph than he did for the other boys. He even gave Joseph special clothes. His brothers had to wear just the ordinary old stuff, but Joseph got designer clothes, imported all the way from Gucci in Paris. The other guys had to wear shirts with no sleeves. Joseph's shirts had

full sleeves, and his clothes were colourfully decorated.

The guys just hated him for that.

But that was not all. Joseph turned out to be a real whistle blower, a blabber. When he was seventeen years old, he had to go out into the fields and look after his father's sheep and goats with some of his brothers. In the evenings Joseph would come running home and tell his father: "Daddy, Dan was very naughty today, he played with a snake!" "Daddy, do you know what Naphtali did today?" "Dad, Asher is a real bad boy....." "Dad, your son Gath is not worth being called

your son. I saw him.....”

And Joseph’s brothers hated him even more for that. If they could kill him, they would do it! Daddy’s little pet!

But then one day Joseph had a strange dream. He did not know what to make of it. Joseph dreamed that there was a field of wheat, and him and his brothers were busy harvesting the wheat. They all tied the sheaves in bundles. But suddenly something strange happened: His eleven brothers’ sheaves of wheat bowed down before his bundle.

What did it all mean? Joseph

could not understand it! It was the strangest dream he ever had! He ran out into the fields to where his brothers were already busy working, and he shouted to them: “Hey guys! Just listen to this strange dream I had!”

“Oh shut up, Daddy’s boy!” they snarled at him. They did not even want to listen to this blabbering, spoilt brat!

But Joseph told them about the dream, and this made them even more angry, because he was the youngest, and now he was insinuating that they were all going to bow down before him. “Our gracious Master!”

“Go home to your Daddy!” they shouted at him and started picking up stones to throw at him.

Joseph’s feelings were hurt. How could they be so nasty to him?

That night Joseph had another dream. This time even stranger. The next morning he ran to his brothers again and he told them: “Listen guys, I had another dream.”

They started to get up to hit him, but Joseph said: “Please just hear me out. In my dream I was standing outside, and then I saw the sun and the moon and eleven stars up in the sky. And then

suddenly they all bowed down to me.”

That was the last straw for the brothers. Poor Joseph had to run for his life. “Who do you think you are?” they shouted at him, “just wait till Father hears about this! Now you are insinuating that not only your brothers, but even your father and mother are going to bow before you! Go home, and don’t come back if you know what is good for you!”

Joseph went home, crying. Nobody understood him.....

He went to his father, Jacob and sat down next to him. Hé would

understand! And Joseph told him about the strange dream.

But Jacob was not a happy father: “Joseph! Shame on you! How dare you have such an arrogant dream! Do you really expect me and your mother and your brothers to be your servants? Shame on you Joseph!”

Not long after that, Joseph’s brothers got their revenge. One day when he was out in the field with them, they caught him and threw him in a well. They wanted to kill him. But then they got even a better idea. A caravan of slave traders came by, so they sold him

as a slave and they even got some money out of the deal. They told their father that a wild animal caught Joseph and ate him. Their poor father was devastated!

Joseph was not the nicest guy around. He was a spoilt brat, he told on his brothers and he thought that he was better than everybody else, even his father. Eventually all this landed Joseph into a lot of trouble. He got exactly what he deserved.

But God did not forget Joseph, and after he became a slave and was even locked up in jail for many years, God took Joseph out of all that hardship. Joseph

changed, and he started to serve God. And God made him a ruler in the mighty Egypt. And just as in his dreams, his father and brothers had to bow before him. But in this way God also used Joseph to save his family from starvation, and to make them a mighty nation.

When I was young, I also was a naughty boy. But God saved and changed me to be a tool for Him in His Kingdom. What about you? God has forgiven the bad things that you did before you became His child. He also wants to use you in His Kingdom. God needs each one of us in His work force.

Like Joseph was willing to work for God, so He wants you and me also to be willing to work for Him.

We all get different tasks. God has a task for you too. Are you going to accept God's forgiveness, and do what He wants you to do?

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

Genesis 39:1-23

Joseph was Jacob's favourite son. Jacob always gave him nice things, and his brothers hated him for that. He also had the most wonderful dreams, and he dreamed that all his family bowed in front of him. They did not like it when he told them about it. Eventually one day his brothers could not take it any longer, and they grabbed him to kill him. But then, before they could do it, some slave traders came past. So they decided to rather sell their little brother as a slave.

The traders took Joseph to Egypt, where a very rich and important man called Potiphar bought him on the market. Joseph worked very hard for his new master. And Potiphar was satisfied with his good slave. So he gave Joseph a big promotion, to become the head of his entire household. Now this was a very big thing, for Potiphar was a rich man and he had a very big palace. So Joseph had a huge responsibility on his shoulders.

But that was not all: Joseph was still a young man and he was good looking. The women could not keep their eyes off him. He

made their hearts pump chocolate.

There was one woman in particular that could not control herself when she saw Joseph: Potiphar's wife. She dreamed about this hunk of slave. Until one day when she could not take it any longer. Her husband, Mr. Potiphar, was out on a big mission - he was away from home for some time.

She waited until Joseph came into the house, and then she came and stood very close to Joseph and she said to him: "Joseph, you are such a handsome young man. You give

me the shivers! I want you to come and sleep with me. Don't worry, the Master is not here. I want your body.”

Joseph got a big fright. She was a beautiful woman, but it was very wrong to sleep with another man's wife. So Joseph said to her: “Sorry, it is very nice of you to invite me Mrs. Potiphar, but I cannot do it - it is wrong!”

Joseph knew that it was wrong. His father told him that you do not sleep with anybody until the day you are married. That is the way God wants it. And even worse: you do not sleep with any other man's wife - EVER! That is a

terrible thing to do. So Joseph walked out, and he carried on with his work.

But Mrs. Potiphar was not satisfied. Now she wanted Joseph even more than ever before. So the next day she thought Joseph must have been thinking about her offer, and she again invited him to bed. And again Joseph refused. He told her that it was wrong. He could not do this. His master trusted him with his whole household. How could he, Joseph, do such a wicked thing against his master? And the worst of all is, that he would be sinning against God. Joseph did

not EVER want to sin against God!

But this woman was adamant. She wanted Joseph in bed! She could not take NO for an answer. Day after day she carried on and tried every trick in the book to seduce Joseph. But every time he refused, because he had his principles, and he stuck to them. He just carried on with the work that his master gave him to do.

Maybe I should explain how people were dressed in those years. The men did not wear shirts and pants like today. Slaves wore nothing on top, and only a cloth draped around their waist.

One morning while Joseph's master, Potiphar was out again, Mrs. Potiphar sent all the servants off so that she was alone in the house. When Joseph came in, he did not suspect anything. Then she called him to her bedroom. When he got there, she said to him that they were all alone, and now is the time that he could get into bed with her. Joseph got a big fright, and he turned around. And then she grabbed him. She got hold of his clothes and ripped it off him. Joseph ran out of the house leaving his clothes behind.

The woman was furious. She screamed! When the people

came in to see what was wrong, she told them that Joseph wanted to rape her. She showed them his clothes. Everybody believed her, and the poor Joseph was thrown into prison innocently.

Maybe you will say: this is a sad story! But God had a plan for Joseph. A few years later Joseph was made Prime Minister of Egypt, because of what happened to him. But that is a story for another day.

We can all learn from what happened to Joseph, and how he stood up to his principles.

The first thing we can learn, is

that it is wrong to have an affair with someone that you are not married to. The woman in the story was a married woman. What she did, was very, very wrong. How did it start? She looked at the handsome Joseph, and she desired him. Once you let a desire take hold of you, you are looking for big trouble. A desire is not only for another person, it could be for many things. If I desire a lot of money, if I want to be rich, then things can go terribly wrong. I could start gambling. I could even start stealing from other people. And if I still do not get enough, I will start robbing

people or a bank. I could end up killing somebody to get money!

Do you see, a desire can be very, very dangerous! You can also let your desires take hold of you like this woman, and desire a certain man or woman. If you let it take over your life, you could end up in bed with the wrong person. The Bible teaches us that the only person you share a bed with, is your own husband or wife!

But then there is the other side of the story, Joseph's side. He knew what was right and wrong, and he stuck to his principles. And that is what God wants from each of us. Each one of us here today knows

what is right and what is wrong in a relationship. Like Joseph, we must stick to what we know is right. Sometimes we get somebody that wants to flirt with us. Run away from it, even if it puts you in a bad spot!

In the same way, if other kinds of opportunities come our way, and we know it is wrong, then we must also rather run away from it. Somebody may offer you a large amount of money if you will do something that is wrong, maybe to deliver drugs, or to help him steal. If it is wrong, stay away from it. Listen to what God tells you to do.

Joseph in Jail

Genesis 39:1-23

In the previous story we learned that Joseph was thrown in jail, simply because he kept to his principles. Potiphar's wife wanted him to sleep with her, and because Joseph said: "No, it is wrong!" he landed in jail.

Maybe you want to say: "But how could God let something like that happen to Joseph? I don't understand! Joseph did what God wanted him to do, but he was put in jail!" Does this really mean that God is unfair?

Let's look at the rest of the story,

and then we decide.

Joseph was thrown in this stinking place with the rest of the prisoners. There were murderers and thieves and robbers and all sorts of horrible people. Joseph decided that he still wanted to serve God, even in jail, just as he did before he was thrown in jail.

Very soon, the jail warden saw that Joseph was really a good, hard-working guy and he always looked happy, even though he was in jail. Eventually Joseph became the jail manager and was put in charge of the whole jail.

One day two guys were thrown in

jail. When Joseph talked to them, he found out that they both had very good jobs. The one was the king's baker and the other one was the king's butler, his wine master. For some reason Farao got mad at them and threw these very important men in jail.

One morning Joseph went around the jail to do his rounds. When he got to these two gentlemen, he saw that they were both very sad and depressed. So he asked them: "What's wrong?" then they told him that they both had very weird dreams, and this is worrying them.

Now, if you remember, when

Joseph was a young boy, he also had very strange dreams. And then God showed him that those dreams really meant something. God wanted to tell Joseph something through his dreams.

So when these guys told Joseph that they had strange dreams, Joseph knew that God wanted to speak to them in this way. So Joseph told them that God knew their dreams, and could tell them what they meant. He said that he could ask God the meaning of their dreams.

The butler said that in his dream there was a grapevine with three branches. Suddenly the branches

were full of flowers, and then the flowers changed into bunches of juicy grapes, right before his eyes. He picked the grapes and made wine from it and gave it to the king to drink.

Joseph asked God: “Please tell me what this means.” God explained him the meaning of the dream and then Joseph told the butler: “This dream means that in three days time you will be released from jail, and the king will give you back your old job as butler.” Joseph also asked the man to remember him when he worked for the king again. He was innocent! He was thrown in jail for

nothing. Maybe the king could have him released. The butler promised that he would do just that.

Then the baker said: “Now it is my turn! I also had a strange dream!” He told Joseph that in his dream he was carrying three baskets on his head. In the top basket there were all sorts of nice things that he baked for the king. But suddenly a lot of birds came out of the sky, and they pecked up all the nice things in the basket.

When Joseph heard the dream, he became very sad, for God told him that this man would die. Joseph told the poor man that

God said that in three days time he would be executed. The king would have him hanged on a pole, and the vultures would come and eat his flesh. Terrible!

Three days later, everything happened exactly as Joseph predicted. The butler was restored to his old job, and the poor baker was executed.

The Butler, of course, ran straight to the king and told him: “Mr. King, Joseph is innocent! Please release him from jail!” Really? Do you really think that is what the butler did? No! He quite forgot about Joseph, and he had to spend years locked up in jail for

something he never did!

Why? The time was not yet right for Joseph to get out of jail. God had a wonderful plan for Joseph, but he had to wait for the right time. God did not forget Joseph, even if the butler forgot about him. God remembered Joseph.

A few years later the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh also had a very strange dream. He asked all the wise people what it meant, but nobody could tell him. Then his butler remembered about Joseph in jail, and how he told him the meaning of his dream. He told the king about Joseph.

But this is a story for another day!
Sometimes we think that the things that happen to us are so unfair. Why did I lose my job? Why did God allow the bad people to come and steal my things? Why is it so that often the bad people become very rich, and me? I am trying to serve God, but I am poor! Why is this happening to me?

It is because God has a plan for your life. He needs you, but first something must happen before he can use you.

The Apostle Paul was thrown into jail. He spent many years in jail -

time that he could have used to preach to people. But God had a much bigger plan for Paul. While he was in jail, he had the time to start writing letters. Paul wrote many letters, and millions and millions of people have read those letters since then. If Paul was not put in jail, we would never have had those wonderful letters: Corinthians, Galatians, Timothy, Philippians and all the others that he wrote!

When bad things happen to you - don't despair. Know that God is allowing this because He has a great plan for your life!

Joseph and the Pharaoh's Dreams

Genesis 39:1-23

In the previous story I told you about Joseph, when he laid out the dreams of the baker and the butler. Do you remember that he asked the butler to please remember him when he was out of jail? Well, the butler completely forgot about him, and two years later Joseph was still in jail for something he never did. He was innocent.

The butler forgot about Joseph, but do you think that God forgot about him? No! God still had a

wonderful plan for Joseph, but Joseph had to wait patiently for the right moment.

One night the mighty king of Egypt, the Pharaoh had a very weird dream. He dreamt that he saw seven beautiful fat cows walking out of the Nile river. They were grazing on the banks of the river. Then he saw seven ugly, thin cows also coming out of the river. They were the ugliest cows that he had ever seen, they walked straight up to the seven fat cows and started eating them. They gulped them down, but still stayed as thin and ugly as before! Then the king woke up.

After a while he fell asleep again, and then Pharaoh had another weird dream. He saw seven ears of grain growing out of one stem. They were beautiful and fat and rich. Then suddenly on another stem there were seven thin, barren ears of wheat with nothing in them. And then the thin wheat gulped down the fat wheat. The king woke up, and he was very worried. He had never dreamed like that before.

The next morning he called all the wise men from his kingdom and told them about the weird dreams he had. Then he asked them what the meaning was of these

dreams. But everybody just shrugged their shoulders: “Sorry, we don’t know!”

The Pharaoh was very sad and very worried, because nobody could help him.

Then suddenly his butler remembered about Joseph, so he went to the Pharaoh and he told him about this slave that was locked up in jail. He told him that Joseph told him and the poor baker what their dreams meant, and it came out exactly like Joseph predicted.

Then the Pharaoh ordered them to go and fetch Joseph. They

gave him a bath, shaved off his long beard and gave him new clothes. Then they took him to the Pharaoh.

When he stood before this mighty king, the Pharaoh asked Joseph if he could please tell him what these two dreams meant. Then Joseph answered him - he told him that first he must clear up one little subject: He, Joseph cannot give him the meaning of these dreams - there is just One who can do that - God Almighty!

Then the Pharaoh told Joseph about his dreams, and he told him that nobody could tell him what these dreams meant - not even

the great priests and magic men of his kingdom.

Then Joseph told him that those two dreams actually meant exactly the same thing: There was going to be seven good years, when the crops will produce plenty of food. But then there was going to be seven very bad years after that - seven years of famine when nothing will grow, and nobody will be able to produce any crops. There will not be any food in the country for seven long years! Joseph told the king that God gave him this terrible dream to warn him about this horrible famine that was

coming.

Joseph could see that this king was a very worried man. So he gave the king some advice. He told him that he would suggest that the king appoint a very clever man to take charge of the crops of the whole of Egypt. This man must appoint people all across the country, and for the next seven years, they must gather all the grain that they can lay their hands on and store it so that they can have a big reserve of food for the time of famine.

The Pharaoh listened to Joseph, and then he called all his big indunas together and told them

what Joseph said to him. Then he asked them: “Where are we going to find a man clever enough to organise such a big thing?” They just looked at one another and shrugged their shoulders. Then the Pharaoh decided: “Joseph is our man! He is the only one clever enough to do it!”

Then he called Joseph and told him that he was going to appoint him to be in charge of the whole of Egypt. Then he made Joseph Prime Minister of the country. He gave him a gold chain to wear around his neck, so that everybody could see that he was the most important man in Egypt.

He got a brand new chariot - the second best in the whole of Egypt. Joseph was still a young man - only thirty years old.

Joseph was a very good manager. Over the next seven years he gathered grain from all over Egypt and stored it. After seven years there were huge store rooms all over the country filled to the brim with grain.

And then, just as Joseph had predicted, the drought came. A terrible drought, where there was not a drop of rain, and no grain was produced. Then all the people started coming to Joseph to buy grain. But it was not only

Egypt that was struck with this terrible drought - all the other countries were hit by it as well - even the country where Jacob and his children - Joseph's brothers were living.

The one day Joseph was still the dirty, forgotten prisoner with the long beard and old tattered clothes in jail, and the next day he was the second most powerful man in the whole of Egypt. How did this happen? Why did this happen?

God had a wonderful plan for Joseph, and at the right moment He used Joseph to fulfil the plan. But maybe you want to ask me

what God's plan actually was? Well, we will have to wait till next time to find out!

Joseph's story gives us hope today. It tells us that God does not forget His children - you and me who believe in Jesus. What is more: He is with me and you all the time. Sometimes He lets things happen in our lives that we do not like - hardships. But He has a plan for our lives, and often He uses those hardships to make us strong so that when the time is ripe, we are strong enough to do what He wants us to do.

Joseph and his Brothers

Genesis 42:1-5

In the meantime, in a country far, far away, in Canaan, the old man Jacob and his sons also ran out of food. There was no rain for a long time, and there was nothing left to eat. If they did not make a plan, they would all die. Jacob called his sons and told them that he heard that there was food available in Egypt. He wanted them to go there and buy enough food to last them a few months. His youngest son, Benjamin had to stay behind with him. He told them, that he already lost Joseph - he did not want to lose Benjamin

as well.

So off they went on a very long journey to Egypt. And no, they did not take the taxi to Egypt - there was a taxi strike! No, they made their journey of 400 km with very ordinary donkeys. It must have taken them two weeks to get there. And then they were told that they must go to the Prime Minister to buy grain.

When they got there, this very important Egyptian man was sitting on his throne, and they bowed before him. They did not even recognize their own brother. But Joseph recognised them immediately, but he kept his pose.

He spoke to them in Egyptian, and they had to use a translator to understand him.

“Where do you come from?” he asked them. So they told him that they were from Canaan, and that they were here to buy grain. So he said to them: “You are lying! You are spies! You only want to come and see what our country looks like so that you can come and make war against us!”

So they said to him: “No, no, we are your servants, please! We are very honest people, and we only want to buy grain.” When it still did not seem as if this big induna believed them, they told him that

they were twelve brothers, but that one brother sadly died. Their youngest brother is still home with their father.

So Joseph said: “I don’t believe you! You are all going to be locked up in jail. I will let one of you go back to fetch your younger brother, otherwise you will all stay locked up! Maybe I will have you all killed!”

So Joseph had them all locked up in jail for three days. He then called them again. He told them that he wanted to see their youngest brother. He would let them go to fetch him, but he would keep one of them as a

ransom so that they would not just run away.

Then one of the brothers, Ruben, told the others: “God is punishing us because we killed Joseph. I told you guys to leave him alone, but you wouldn’t listen. And this is what we got for it!” You see, Ruben was the one that wanted to save Joseph. He thought that Joseph was dead.

What the brothers did not know, is that this “Egyptian” understood every word that they said. So he sent them away, and he kept Simeon, the eldest brother back in jail. But Joseph also told his servants to secretly put all their

money back inside the bags of grain. He also gave them enough food for the road.

When they got back in Canaan, they told Jacob everything. They also told him that the Egyptian was keeping Simeon in jail, and that he wanted to see Benjamin. Jacob refused. “I will not let him go! Joseph is dead already, and Simeon is in jail. I do not want to lose another son! No! Definitely NO!”

But after a few months they ran out of food again, and so Jacob told his sons: “Go and buy us more food.” So they told him: “We cannot go without Benjamin

because that Egyptian will have us all killed if we arrive there without him!” But Jacob refused bluntly. Eventually, after a lot of pleading, he said: “OK, take him.” He also told them to take a lot of nice gifts for this Egyptian Big Induna. And they must give him back all the money that they found in their grain bags - he did not want trouble! Then he said something else that is very important: He said that they must remember that God Almighty will provide, and He will make this Egyptian be nice to them, and let the Egyptian send back his two sons. But if this does not happen,

then that is the way God wants it, and I will not blame Him.

And so, once again the brothers saddled up their donkeys. They did what Jacob told them to do. They took a lot of expensive gifts with them, and also all the money that was in their bags, and started on their two-week journey to Egypt. It was hot and dry, and through this terrible desert there was nothing but sand and rocks. No plants; no water - nothing. For days and days they travelled. Then they eventually saw the beautiful river Nile in the distance. They were very happy to be in Egypt, because there was water

and there was food. But what was going to happen to them? What was this terrible Egyptian going to do with them?

When they arrived, they went straight to the place where they last bought their grain. But then the official told them that he got orders to take them to the Big Induna's house. They were scared - why did they have to go there? Was he going to have them all killed because he thought that they stole his money? What did Joseph have in mind for them?

Remember that God had a great plan for Joseph. Many years

before, God promised Joseph's great grandfather, Abraham that He was going to give his children their own country. God's plan was to build a great nation, so that when His time was ready, He would send them all together to go and take their land. Joseph was the key to all of this, because he had to bring them all together in Egypt, where they could grow into a great nation. Without Joseph, this could never happen.

In the same way, God also uses you and me. Maybe the task that He has for you does not look very big, but each of us is an important part in God's great plan.

Joseph is Revealed

Genesis 44:1-6

When Joseph's brothers arrived at his house, they told the official: "Please sir, we did not mean to steal the money - we don't know how it got in our bags. We brought it all back!" But the official told them not to worry - it was God who put the money in their bags.

They waited in Joseph's home for a long time. Late that afternoon Joseph came in. They all bowed in front of him and gave him gifts. I am sure Joseph must have thought about the dream he had

many years before - where all his brothers bowed before him, but he still kept a straight face. He asked them about their old father - was he still alive?

Then Joseph invited them to have dinner with him. They couldn't believe that he was treating them so nicely. When they went to sit down at the table, he told each of them where he must sit. He arranged them so that they sat from the youngest to the oldest in exactly the right order - all eleven of them. They just looked at each other - how did he know? When the food arrived, the youngest brother, Benjamin got five times

more food than the others. He was very puzzled - why would this important Egyptian do that to him?

Early the next morning the brothers packed their donkeys to go back home. What they did not know, is that Joseph told the officials to put their money back in their bags once again. But he also told them to put his beautiful silver jug in Benjamin's grain bag.

And so, off they went to Canaan. They were very happy, because they were all together again, and they had enough food.

But then they saw something very

distressing. Only a short way out of the city, they saw a dust cloud behind them. When they looked carefully, they saw that it was Egyptian soldiers riding straight towards them. “What now!?” they thought, “what is wrong this time?”

When the soldiers reached them, they could see that there was BIG trouble! Joseph’s chief official got off his horse, and walked towards the brothers. They could clearly see that this man was not happy - he was furious. “Why did you do such a bad thing against my boss?” he asked them.

“But.... but we did nothing

wrong....” they said. Then the official told them that they stole Joseph’s silver jug. “Why would we do something bad like that? We are honest people! If you find that jug amongst us, then you can have the culprit killed!” But the official told the soldiers: “Search them! The one with the jug will become Joseph’s slave!”

So the brothers took the bags off their donkeys and opened them, and the soldiers started searching through the bags. And what do you think they found? Of course, Joseph’s mug right there in young Benjamin’s bag.

Now they were in big, big trouble.

If Joseph took Benjamin as his slave, they knew that they would be in very deep trouble with their father Jacob. He will surely die from shock. So they all turned around and went straight back to Joseph. Remember, they still did not know that Joseph was their own brother that they sold twenty years before.

They found Joseph in his grand house, fell on the ground before him and pleaded for their lives. They told him that they really did not know anything about the jug, but they were willing to all be his slaves.

What do you think Joseph said?

He said to them: “No thank you, I don’t want you in my house! All I want is young Benjamin - he will be my slave. The rest of you - go home!”

So one of the brothers, Juda came forward, and he started pleading with Joseph. He told him about his poor old father - that his son that he loved so much died many years ago. And when he was an old man already, he got another son, Benjamin, and he loved this boy very much. He told him that his father did not want Benjamin to go to Egypt with them, but he, Juda, gave his father the guarantee that

Benjamin would come back. If Benjamin did not go back, his father would die of sorrow. So Juda said to Joseph: “I will stay as your slave in Benjamin’s place.”

You know, Joseph was acting all the time to see if his brothers had really changed. But now that he saw that they were different, he just could not keep it up any longer. He sent all the officials out of the room, and then he started crying. He was sobbing, and the brothers did not know what was going on. Then he told them: “I am Joseph, your brother!”

And then he told them the long

story of how he worked for Potiphar as a slave after they sold him, and how he landed in jail and how he eventually became Prime Minister of Egypt. Then he hugged them and kissed them while the tears were streaming down his face.

Not long after that, Joseph fetched his father, Jacob and brought him to Egypt so that he and Joseph's brothers could live in luxury for the rest of their lives.

Joseph's brothers did very bad things to him years before. Joseph could have used this opportunity to get back at them and have them punished. But he

did not - he forgave them, and he even gave them the very best.

God also wants us to forgive those people who did bad things against us. A year ago, Louis Brittz and his wife Hettie were robbed. One of the men raped Hettie. Do you know what she did? She did not swear at this guy, and tell him that he will burn in hell. No, she told him that she forgave him. In the Lord's prayer we pray: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Come, let us truly forgive other people and forget about the bad things of the past.

Jonah Runs Away From God

Jonah 1:1-3

Have you ever been given a task that is just too much for you? You are told to do something, and then you think that you simply cannot do what is asked from you. What do you do if that happens to you? Simple: you say no! If your boss tells you: “There is a snake in the bedroom. Go and catch it and put it in the garden!” What will you do? I think you will say: “I will rather run away so that my boss will never see me again!”

Today I want to tell you about a

man who got such a task. He lived many, many years ago. He was a prophet – an mFundisi, a pastor. One night this prophet was lying in his bed, when he heard a voice calling him. This voice said: “Jonah!” And the prophet immediately knew that this was the voice of God. Then God told him: “Jonah, I want you to go to the big city of Niniveh. The people of that city are very bad. I want you to go and preach to those people.”

Pastor Jonah got a big fright. “Nineveh! Eish! That is a very bad place, Lord!” he said to God. “I’ll have to think about it!”

That whole day long Jonah could not do anything right - all he was thinking about was this terrible thing God wanted him to do. "What must I do? I, Jonah, I am a Jew. We Jews do not mingle with other nations. The people of Nineveh are not Jews - they are heathens! They do not even pray to God! They have their own gods. No, I can never go there! What must I do?"

That night, Jonah could not sleep at all. He was tossing and turning. He even had a fever, purely because he was so scared of the people of Nineveh. All night long he was thinking of ways to get out

of this mess. “I have work to do in Israel!” he said to himself. But the problem was, that he knew that God would come back to him. So Jonah thought of a very bright idea.

What do you think Jonah’s idea was? How was he going to get out of this big dilemma?

Very early that next morning, Pastor Jonah was a very busy man. He was busy packing his bags. So he was a good man? He decided to do what God told him to do, and he is on his way to Nineveh to go and preach to the people, like any good Pastor should do?

But something was not quite right, because when Jonah started walking, he was not going east, in the direction of Nineveh. No, he was going west, towards the harbour!

“Hey Jonah! You are going in the wrong direction! You do not take a ship to go through the desert!”

“No, I am not going through the desert. I am going west! I decided to go to Tarshish.”

“But Jonah, do you know where Tarshish is? It is nowhere near Nineveh. It is almost 5000 kilometers from Nineveh. What are you going to do there?”

“That is none of your business!”

The city of Nineveh is in the north of Iraq, about 750 kilometers north-east from Israel. Jonah was going in the opposite direction, towards the west of Spain, almost 4000 kilometers from Israel. Why, do you think did Jonah want to go so far in the wrong direction? Jonah thought that if he went that far away from Israel, then God would not be able to get hold of him. Jonah wanted to get away from God, and he wanted to get away from the task that God gave him.

Today I want to ask you: Where is God? What does the Bible teach

us about where God is?

Think about this: God is the Creator of heaven and earth. If He created everything out of nothing, then surely He is bigger than His creation! How big is the universe? The clever people tell us that it is 15 thousand, million light years from one end to the other end of the universe. That is very, very big. The earth is just a tiny little spot in this universe. Therefore God is so big, that He can hold the whole earth in the palm of His hand.

What does that mean? We cannot hide from God! He is all over, everywhere, all at once. If Jonah

thought that he was running away from God, then he made a very big mistake. It is like holding a tennis ball in your hand. On this ball, there is an ant. He runs around on that ball. Do you think he can run away from you? No! Wherever he runs on that ball, he is still just in your hand. In the same way, Jonah could run to any place on earth, but he was still just in God's hand.

The second, very important lesson that we must learn from Jonah, is that God gives each one of us a task to do. And God does not give you a task that is so big that you can not do it.

Think about Jonah. What was his job? He was a prophet, a pastor. He studied the Bible for many years, and he was trained to be a pastor. What is a prophet or a pastor's work? Of course to preach to people. He had to go and tell the people about all the things that he learnt from God. That is easy.

But then God gave him a brand new task. God told him to go and preach to the people of Nineveh. Now that was an impossible task! Was it really? What was there more than the work that he was doing every day? Absolutely nothing! All he had to do, was to

go and do exactly what he was doing in Israel, to preach to people.

But Jonah was scared, because he thought that he was going to get dirty if he preached to people outside Israel. He thought it was different out there.

What is God asking you and me to do? He does not want us to do any more than we can do.

You know what: A few years ago God asked me to go and preach to Zulu people. I said: “No God, I can not speak the Zulu language!” Then He said: “You don’t have to, you can talk to

them in English.” Then I said: “No God, I don’t know how to talk to Zulu people.” And he said: “Just tell them what you would tell any other people.” And so I listened to God, and I did what he asked me to do. And you know what? I love talking to Zulu people!

The first thing God is asking from you today, is that like you talk to each other about Jesus in your church, you go and do exactly the same outside to other people you meet. Just talk about the love of Jesus. In that way you are spreading God’s Word. Invite them to come to church on Sundays to come and listen to

God's Word and to sing and pray
togeteher.

Jonah and the Big Fish

Jonah 1:4-7

In the previous story we heard how God asked this prophet to go to a city called Nineveh, but Jonah did not want to go, so he decided to run away from God. He planned to go to a far, far-away place called Tarshish.

Early that morning we see Jonah walking to the harbour of Joppa to board a ship. He pays the captain for his fare, and then Jonah gets on the ship. But Jonah is so scared that God could see him on the ship, that he goes down into the bottom part of the ship where

nobody can see him - not even God. Or so he thinks.

He lies down on a bench, and after a while he can feel the ship starting to move. And then Jonah falls asleep.

A few hours later the wind starts blowing quite hard. The captain is worried, because this does not look very good. The wind gets worse and worse until it develops into a terrible storm. The waves are crashing over the ship and the wind is throwing the ship this way and that way. And all the sailors on the ship are very, very scared. They start throwing the cargo of the ship into the sea so

that the ship will be lighter, but it doesn't help. They throw more cargo into the sea, but it just gets worse and worse. So they start praying to their gods. But that does not help at all either, because their gods are dead gods - just idols.

In the meantime Jonah is still in the bottom of the ship, fast asleep. He does not even know about the storm. Then the captain of the ship tells one of the sailors to go and fetch Jonah. They shake him to wake him up: "Jonah! Come on, get up. We are sinking! The captain wants to see you right away!" When Jonah

gets to the top, he gets a big fright. “What is going on?” Jonah realises that this storm is going to sink their ship. It is terrible! The waves are smashing the ship. The wind is tearing the sails apart.

So Jonah tells the captain that this storm is not just a normal storm. It is God that made this storm because he, Jonah is trying to run away from God. Then Jonah tells the captain: “Throw me in the sea, then the storm will calm down.”

At first the sailors say no, and they try to row the ship out of trouble, but the storm just gets

worse. Any moment now the ship can sink. Then they decide: “Jonah must go!” They grab him and throw him over the side, right into the waves. Jonah tries to keep his head above the terrible angry waves, but then he remembers that he can’t swim. Jonah never learnt how to swim. He sinks to the bottom like a brick.

In the meantime the sailors are standing on the deck of the ship and they watch Jonah going down. But then something else happens: Suddenly the wind dies down and the sea becomes calm. Those huge, big waves

completely disappear. And the sailors realise that Jonah was right: this was not an ordinary storm, it was God who made the storm. But it was also God who calmed the storm again.

We must realise that God is powerful! Nothing is impossible for Him. It was like that in Jonah's time, and it is still exactly the same today. The clever people say that God is Omnipotent. That is a big word to say that nobody and nothing is as powerful as God. Last time we saw how big God is. He is bigger than the world and He is even bigger than the whole universe. We also

learnt that God is everywhere at the same time. Now we also know that God is more powerful than anything else.

Many years after Jonah, Jesus was on a little boat on the sea, when a huge storm hit the boat. What happened? All Jesus did was to tell the storm to be calm. And it happened. Immediately the storm died down and there was no wind.

But what about Jonah? Does he drown? After Jonah starts sinking, we see him trying to hold his breath. He goes down, down, down, right to the bottom of the ocean. Jonah is starting to

become blue in the face. He cannot hold his breath any longer. And then he starts praying: “God, I am sorry that I tried to run away from You. Please forgive me.” He prays again: “Lord, I do not want to die now, please Lord!” Jonah can see the end coming. He is going to die, and there is nothing and nobody that can save him.

Then suddenly he feels something grabbing him. And it becomes dark around him. This is the end for Jonah!

But then something very strange happens: Suddenly there is air! Jonah can breathe! But oh what a smell! It is stinking! Like fish!

Jonah thinks: “OK, now I am dead, and I landed in the wrong place - in hell!” He cannot see anything around him, because it is pitch dark. He starts feeling where he is. It is slimey! Yeuch! But this strange thing he is sitting on is soft, almost like a cushion! Or maybe a tongue, a huge tongue! “What is this thing I am sitting in? Something swallowed me! What can it be?”

Suddenly Jonah realises: “I am not dead! It must be God who sent a very big fish to swallow me to save me from drowning!” Jonah is actually sitting in the mouth of a huge fish. So

immediately Jonah starts praying, and he says thank you to God because He saved him. He says: “God, I was in great trouble - I was almost dead, and then I prayed to You, and You heard my prayer and You saved me. I want to praise Your Name, God!”

Then Jonah waits for something to happen. And he waits and waits, but nothing happens. After a day, Jonah almost gives up hope. The day becomes 2 days, and still nothing happens.

For three very long days Jonah sits there inside this fish. Is he going to die inside the fish? But then suddenly the fish opens his

mouth and he spits Jonah out. But not in the deep sea - right on the beach! Jonah is saved!

And then again God speaks to Jonah. He says: “Jonah, I want you to go to the big city Nineveh. You must go and preach there Jonah, I will tell you exactly what you must say to them.”

What do you think Jonah said to God? Was he now willing to go?

Next time we will see what Jonah answered God.

What do we learn from this story? Jonah did a very bad thing. He refused to do what God asked him, and he also tried to run away

from God. When Jonah realised that he was in trouble, he prayed and asked God to forgive him. What did God do? He forgave Jonah. And he gave him a second chance. God is also always willing to forgive us and to give you and me a second chance. Even if you have done very bad things in the past, God will forgive your sins.

Jonah in Nineveh

Jonah 3

Jonah was running away from God, because God asked him to go to Nineveh. But God changed Jonah's life when a big fish swallowed him. Again God spoke to Jonah - he said: "Jonah, I want you to go to the big city Nineveh. You must go and preach there Jonah, I will tell you exactly what you must say to them." What do you think Jonah said to God? Was he now willing to go?

But before we answer that question, we must realise that Jonah did a very bad thing. He

refused to do what God asked him to do, and he also tried to run away from God. When Jonah realised that he was in trouble, he prayed and asked God to forgive him. What did God do? He forgave Jonah. And he gave him a second chance.

God also wants to forgive you and me for all the bad things that we did. God wants to give us a second chance. Even if you have done very bad things in the past, God will forgive your sins. All He wants us to do, is to believe in Jesus.

The question is, if Jonah would go to Nineveh? Yes indeed! He

went back home and got himself some clean clothes, and then he started walking to the city of Nineveh. As I said last time, Nineveh is a long way from Israel. It is as far as from here to Johberg - 660 km. There was no bus or train or even taxis. Jonah had to walk all the way. After a long time, Jonah finally saw the city with high walls around it. "What must I say to those people Lord?" Jonah asked God, because he still did not know what God wanted him to say to the people.

And then God answered him: "Tell those people, that in forty day's

time I will destroy the city.” Jonah smiled: He was glad that God wanted to kill all those horrible people, because they were not Israelites, and they were very bad people.

When he got to the city, he started walking around to see who those people were. Early the second morning, Jonah went to the market place, and then he shouted so that everybody could hear him: “God says that in forty day’s time He is going to destroy this city!”

Suddenly it went quiet: “What did you say?” somebody asked.

“God is going to destroy Nineveh!” Jonah answered him, “You only have forty days left!”

Jonah thought that everybody was going to laugh at him. He was sure that they were going to mock him, or even chase him out of the city! But no! Suddenly Jonah could hear somebody starting to cry. It was quiet. Nobody said anything. And then the people started disappearing into their homes. Everybody in the city was very scared. So Jonah walked out of the city to go and spend the night outside under a tree.

The next morning Jonah went into

the city again. He could not believe his eyes! All the streets were deserted - empty. There was nobody around. Then Jonah saw one lonely man walking down the street. This man was not wearing ordinary clothes - he was wearing a sack. "Where is everybody?" Jonah asked him.

"Don't you know?" the man asked Jonah, "Oh, you must be a stranger around here. The king said that we must all go in mourning. We must repent our sins. The king also told us that everybody must wear sacks to show that we are sorry about our sins. You must see the king: even

hé took off his grand royal clothes, and he is wearing a sack like everybody else.”

Then the man told Jonah: “Do you know what? The city has never been so quiet. All the crime is gone. Since yesterday nobody has been robbed or murdered. No stealing, no violence! Nothing bad is happening. Everybody is fasting and praying to God.”

Jonah turned around and walked out of the city. He simply could not believe it! All he did was to tell the people that God was going to destroy the city, and now this happened! He went back to his tree and sat down.

And then he heard God's voice deep inside him: "Jonah, I have seen that the people of Nineveh are truly sorry for the bad things that they were doing. I have decided not to destroy the city any more."

Now what do you think Jonah's reaction was? Did he say: "Yes! Yes! I did my work very well! Thank you God that You are now willing to save the city."

No, that is NOT what Jonah said. He said: "God, how can you do such a thing to me! You can't change Your mind now! It is not fair Lord! I want You to destroy this city as You promised to do

Lord!” Jonah was angry with God. Now I want to ask you a question: Do you think that it was fair of Jonah to insist that God destroy the city of Nineveh? After all, this city was very, very bad, and who says they were not going to go back to their old wicked ways?

Let us just go back one month in history: We heard that Jonah refused to do what God asked him to do. Do you remember? And then we saw Jonah trying to run away from God. He thought that God was not big and powerful enough to find him. That was a very bad thing to do to God. Did God punish him? Did

He kill Jonah and send him to hell?

No. What did God do? He said to Jonah: “I forgive you.” He also said to Jonah: “I will give you a second chance. I still want you to work for me. You are not fired Jonah! I have a big task for you!”

But what did Jonah do? He was not willing to forgive the people of Nineveh. He wanted them all killed and sent to hell. In the same way, God is today still willing to forgive you and me, and give us a second chance.

Now we learn that even a very, very bad lot like the people of

Nineveh, God is willing to forgive. Nineveh should have been destroyed, and all the people killed. But God was willing to forgive them and give them a new life.

It does not matter how bad your past was. if you are willing to believe in Jesus, then God will give you a new life, an everlasting life.

But then, God is also asking something of you and me. Just as He forgives us, He wants us to also forgive other people. Even if somebody does a very bad thing against you, God still wants you to forgive that person. Don't be

like Jonah! Forgive completely.

What does it mean to forgive? Say I buy myself a nice book. Then someone asks me if she can borrow it. Later I ask her: “Are you finished with the book?” And she says to me: “Sorry, I lost your book. I can’t give it back to you.”

What do I do? Do I say to her: “I want my book! I don’t care where you get another one, but I want my book!”

No, that is not forgiving. If I forgive this person, then I go and take my own money, and I buy myself another book, and I say to her: “Don’t worry about the book.

Forget it, I've got another one. I am not mad at you for that. We are still good friends.”

God forgave your sins. Have you forgiven other people yet?

A Story of Two Boys

1 Sam 3

1 Sam 16:11-13

Our story starts many, many years ago. There was a woman with the name of Hannah. She had no children, and she so much wanted to have a child of her own. One day she went to the temple and prayed very hard for God to give her a son. And then she made a promise to God: If He gave her a son, she would give this boy to God to work for Him. She was crying while she prayed.

God answered her prayer, and a year later she had a son - she

called him Samuel. Hannah never forgot her promise to God, and when the boy was old enough, she took him back to the temple. She told the old priest, Eli, about her promise to God, and then she left the young boy, Samuel, to serve God in the temple.

When little Samuel was only about twelve years old, God spoke to him one night, and told him to give the old priest Eli a message. It was the first time God spoke to the boy. After that God spoke to him many times, and little Samuel later became a big leader in Israel, and also a prophet. He taught the people of

Israel about God, and he taught them how to really worship God.

The little boy Samuel grew up to be a man, and he became a prophet for God. Many years passed. One day, about 50 years later, when Samuel was already an old man, God spoke to him again. At that time Saul was the king in Israel. But King Saul was not a very good king, for he did not do what God wanted him to do.

God said to Samuel that He wanted a new king for Israel, because Saul did not obey God. Samuel did not know who this new king was going to be. God

just told him to go to a man called Jesse - one of his sons would be the new king.

So Samuel did what God told him. He went to Jesse, and he told him the big news: “God wants one of your sons to be the next king of Israel.”

So Jesse called his eldest son - he was very glad to know that his son was going to be king. But when Samuel saw this young man, he heard God’s voice inside him: “No Samuel, this is not the one!”

This was strange, because it should always be the first-born

that becomes king. Jesse did not feel good about it, but then he called his second son. And once again God said to Samuel that this young man was not the chosen one. The third son was called and the fourth one - but none of them was the right one. Jesse became very worried - who was the one God wanted? Eventually the last of his seven sons stood before Samuel, and still God told him that he was not the right one.

Samuel was very puzzled. What did God really mean? He specifically told him that one of Jesse's sons was to become king.

Did God make a mistake?

Then Samuel said to Jesse: “I do not understand it - God told me that your son will become king. But now there is no son here that God wants. What is wrong?”

So Jesse told him: “Oh, I do have another son - a young boy. But he is just a little shepherd, he is out there somewhere, herding the sheep. Surely it cannot be him? He is just a simple little herdsman!

But Samuel insisted that Jesse send for the boy. And the moment Samuel saw this youngster, he knew: “This is Israel’s new king!”

“What is your name, boy?” he asked him.

“David!” the boy answered.

Then the old man, Samuel, stood up. He took a horn from his cloak. There was olive oil in it. He then poured the oil on David’s head and he anointed him as the future king of Israel. But David had to wait many years before he eventually became king. But he was the best king that Israel ever had.

Let’s talk a little about these two boys.

Little Samuel: He was only a small boy of maybe 5 years old

when he started working for God. But there were two things in his life: The first was his mother - she prayed for him all the time. The second thing, was that he listened to God, and he did what God asked him to do. Many years later, he became a prophet. All the people of Israel had great respect for him, because he was a real man of God. Even when he was very old already, people still honoured him as the man of God.

When people look at me, what do they think of me? And what do people think of you? Can they see that you are a man or woman of God? Can they see it in my

life? I must live in such a way that people can immediately see that I am a Christian. But even more important: I must be such a happy Christian - so full of love and joy and happiness, that other people will want to be the same as me. They must become hungry for Jesus in their life when they see me, because they must see that it is wonderful to be a Christian.

Young David: There was a huge difference between the life of Samuel and David. Samuel grew up in the church. David grew up in the bush and the desert, looking after sheep every day. How can you learn about God

when you have such a horrible job? It was a rough life!

One day while David was out there, lonesome in the bush, he looked at his sheep grazing peacefully. He knew that he was their shepherd, and he was looking after them very well. He always took them to the nicest green grass, and he gave them water when they were thirsty. And if there was danger - maybe a lion or a jackal - he was there to protect them.

But David also knew that God was looking after him in exactly the same way. Then he started writing a beautiful song: “The

Lord God - He is my
Shepherd UJehova
ungumalusi wami,
angiyikuswela.”

David wrote many beautiful songs about God. That young boy David learnt to love God. And many years later, when he became king, he taught these lovely songs to his people.

When God first spoke to Samuel, he actually became a prophet. He was now a very important boy. Do you know what he did? He simply carried on being the boy who sweeps the floors of the temple. But he served God!

When David was anointed as king, he became the most important person in Israel. What did he do? He simply carried on being a shepherd boy. But he served God.

Just like David and Samuel, we are also very important people, because as Christians we are God's children. It is something we can be very, very proud of! But just like David and Samuel, we must be humble - we must never ever show other people that we are better than them. It was not because we were good that we became children of God, but purely because of His grace.

Therefor we must serve God, and do what He wants us to do.

David and the Giant

1 Sam 16:14-23

There was war in Israel. One of their worst enemies, the Philistines, invaded Israel, and they wanted to take their country. Thousands of soldiers came with all their horses and chariots and swords. And then they made their camp on a hill, not far from a small stream. On the other side of the stream the Israelite soldiers made their camp and they prepared to defend their country.

Then the Philistines came with a dirty trick: One of their soldiers - a man with the name of Goliath -

was a huge man. He was a full three meters tall - almost double my length. He was not only tall, but he was very, very strong. His armour clothes weighed 57 kilograms. He had a heavy bronze helmet on his head and he had a huge bronze sword. He carried a spear that weighed 68 kilograms. Can you imagine how strong a guy should be to carry these sorts of weapons with him? He must have looked like a huge, ugly beast to the poor Israelites.

The Philistines just sat around doing nothing, because they knew that they were not even going to fight. Goliath was going

to do all their fighting for them. This ugly man went to the top of the hill, and then he started shouting at the Israelites on the other side. He swore at them, and then he invited them to come and fight against him. He said that if there is any man that will fight him, that can kill him, then all the Philistines could become Israel's slaves. And then he laughed, because he knew that there was not a single Israelite that could win him.

On the other side of the river the poor Israelites were shivering, because they could see their end coming. This lot of barbarians

were going to kill them all like flies.

In the mean time there was a young red-faced boy looking after his father's sheep, out in the fields near Bethlehem. His name was David. He was too young to go to war like his brothers. David was sitting under a tree, playing his harp and looking after the sheep. Then one of his father's servants brought him a message that his father wanted to see him.

David's father told him that he wanted him to take food to his brothers where they were making war against the Filistines.

So young David loaded the food on a donkey and off he went to the war zone. When he got there, he saw that something very big was wrong. Why were they not fighting? And just at that moment he saw the huge beast, Goliath, climbing up the hill on the other side of the river. David heard the guy shouting and swearing and saying horrible things about the Israelites. David was furious: “You can’t let this guy say such things about us and about God’s people. Why don’t you kill him?”

And they said to David: “Are you mad? Nobody can kill him. Just look at him - he is a monster!”

“I’m not scared of him!” David told the soldiers.

“Oh go home!” his brothers told him, “What do you know about war? You are just a little boy. Go back and look after your father’s sheep!”

In the mean time, one of the soldiers went to the king to tell him the big joke: “There is a young boy who wants to go and fight that huge Philistine, Goliath! Don’t you think that is the funniest story that you ever heard?”

But King Saul did not think it was a joke: “Go and fetch him - I want to see him!” he commanded the

soldier.

When David got to the king, Saul told him: “You can’t fight against this man. He will kill you. Did you see him?”

And David replied: “I am not scared. I once killed a lion with my bare hands when it attacked my sheep, and I also killed a bear. Why should I be scared of a man?” And then he said something very, very important: “God saved me from the lion and the bear. The same God will also give me the strength to kill that Philistine.” Young David put all his trust in God.

So king Saul saw that David was adamant to go and fight Goliath. But he was not dressed for war. All the other soldiers had heavy armour to guard them against the enemy's weapons. So he gave David his own armour suit to put on, and also his own sword. But King Saul was a very big man, much taller than any of his soldiers, and David was only a short little guy. This armour was way too heavy and too big for David. So he told the king: "No, thanks, this is not going to work. I will go as I am."

And so David went to fight the big Philistine, and all he took with him

was his stick and a slingshot. A slingshot is basically just two pieces of string tied to a piece of leather. You put a small stone on the leather and then you hold the two ends of the string in your hand. You swing the stone around the top of your head, and then you let go of one of the strings, and the stone will go flying to your target. It is very, very difficult to throw this stone accurately. I used it a lot when I was a boy. But I cannot remember that I ever hit the target!

With this dubious weapon, David went down to the river. He picked up five smooth pebbles, and then

he crossed the river. On the hill on the other side, this barbarian was standing, shouting and swearing. When David reached him, this huge man looked down at the tiny figure of David. He laughed at him and he asked him if he thought that he was a dog, that David came to fight him with a stick and a piece of string? He laughed at David. And he told him that he was going to make mincemeat out of him. "I am going to feed your meat to the vultures and the hyena's." In his one hand was this heavy bronze sword, and in the other hand he had his huge spear. He looked awesome.

David looked at him calmly, and he said to the man: “You come to me with all your mighty weapons. I come to you in the Name of God. Today I will show the world that God is Almighty.”

And then, before Goliath could even move his fearsome weapons, David swung the slingshot. He aimed carefully, and then he let go of the string. A small stone whizzed out of the leather and it hit the giant right between the eyes - the only spot on his face that was not covered in bronze. Goliath fell like a huge tree. David grabbed the man's own sword and he chopped off

his head.

When the Philistines saw what happened, they got a big fright, and they started running. The Israelites went after them and they won the war.

Sometimes we get to situations that look totally impossible for us. But there is something that we must never ever forget: God is greater than any situation. Nothing is impossible for God. We must learn to trust God in ANY situation – to put our full trust in Him alone. After all, He IS the Almighty God!

Elijah and the Widow

1 Kings 17:1-16

Three thousand years ago there was a king who ruled over Israel by the name of Ahab. He got married to a heathen woman from Sidon. Her name was Jezebel. She did not worship God but she worshipped idols. The god she worshipped was called, he was the god of nature, and he was supposed to give rain and see that the harvest was good. The problem was that King Ahab started worshiping Baäl with his wife, and in the end almost all the people in Israel also started worshipping this god, and they

forgot about the real God altogether.

But not everybody did that. There were still a few people who worshipped God Almighty. One of them was a prophet by the name of Elijah. He was a poor man and he lived in someone's backyard. But he loved God.

Then one day God said to Elijah that He had tried many times to get the people of Israel to turn back to Him, but they would not listen. Now He was going to take drastic measures. He was going to send a terrible drought into the country for a long time, until the people would start listening to

Him. He wanted Elijah to go to King Ahab and tell him the bad news about this drought.

So the prophet went to the mighty king and he told him: “In the name of the LORD, the living God of Israel, whom I serve, I tell you that there will be no dew or rain for the next two or three years until I say so.”

The king just laughed at him, because Ahab’s god, Baäl was in charge of the rain. How could Elijah be so stupid as to think that he could stop it? But Ahab did not reckon with God. And all the rain stopped. Not even a drop of dew! Then Ahab became furious and

he wanted to kill Elijah.

But God told Elijah to go and hide in the mountains by a little stream called Cherith. So Elijah fled from Ahab and he went to this stream. Elijah started wondering where he was going to get food from? But God also provided for him. That evening a few crows came flying to where he was hiding, and in their beaks they had food. They brought him bread and meat. And they left it on a rock for Elijah. He was amazed! The next morning the birds were back again with more food. For the next few months these birds came every morning and every evening with

enough food for Elijah.

But the drought became worse, and eventually the stream dried up. Elijah was becoming worried, but God had another plan for him. One day God told Elijah that He wanted him to go to a town called Zarephath. He told Elijah that he would find a widow there, and that she would look after him and give him food.

So Elijah started walking. It was a long, long way to Zarephath. But when he got there, the first thing he saw was a widow standing at the entrance of the town, collecting bits of firewood. He could see that she was very poor,

but he knew that this was the widow God had told him about. So Elijah went to her and asked her: “I am thirsty, please bring me a cup of water.”

Now remember, Elijah was a complete stranger to her, and they were not even from the same nation. But she did not hesitate, and straight away she walked to her house to fetch this stranger something to drink. But as she was walking away, Elijah asked her: “And please bring me some bread too!”

Then the woman turned around, and Elijah could see that she was in great trouble. She told him her

sad story. She had a young child, but there was no food left in their house. They used up their last bit of food, and all that was left was just enough flour and oil to bake one little bread for the last meal for her and her son. After that there was nothing, and they were going to die of starvation.

But God had already spoken to Elijah. He told Elijah what to say to this poor woman. “Don’t worry”, Elijah said to her, “Go ahead and bake your bread, but I first want you to bake a little bread for me and bring it to me. After that you can bake something for you and your son.”

Now that does not make sense to us. She already told him that there wasn't enough to bake for him and herself and her son. Didn't Elijah listen to what she was saying?

But Elijah wasn't finished: "If you do that", he told her, "then you will see that there will still be flour left over, and there will still be oil left in the jar. There will always be flour and oil, and you will not run short until the rain comes back. That is what God told me."

Do you think the poor widow believed Elijah? If I was her, I think I would have said to him: "No, you are trying to play a trick

on me! Sorry, go find your own bread!”

But this woman turned around and went into her house and did exactly what Elijah asked her to do. She used her last little bit of flour and oil and baked him a little bread, and gave it to the prophet to eat. And then she went back to her house. And she looked inside the jar where she kept her flour, and to her amazement she saw that there was flour inside. How could it be? She just used the last little bit for the prophet!

So she baked some bread for her and her son, and she used all the flour she had. The next day, once

again there was flour and oil in the jars. It was a miracle! God provided for her!

This poor widow took the prophet Elijah into her house, and for the next few years she cared for him and gave him food. And she never ran short of flour and oil to bake enough for them to eat.

Today God is also talking to you and me as He was talking to Elijah and that widow. Elijah did what God asked him to do, and when Elijah obeyed God, then God provided for him. First it was the birds that fed him and then the widow. God also spoke to the widow through Elijah, and she

obeyed God. And He provided for her.

God has got different things that He wants us to do. He told me to teach the Zulu community of Ballito about the Bible. I didn't know how to do it, but I said to God: "Yes, I am willing." And He did the rest. He taught me how to speak and what to say to you. He provided. If He wants you to do something for Him, He will provide with everything that you need to do the job. All He wants you to do is to be willing and to trust Him with all your heart. If He tells you to speak to one of your friends about Jesus, what is your

usual reaction? “No, I don’t know what to say to my friend!” Trust God and go ahead and speak to your friend, God will give you the right words.

Elijah and the Prophets of Baäl

1 Kings 18:16-24

The king of Israel, Ahab and his wife Jezebel, were very bad. They worshipped idols, and so did the people of Israel.

In the previous story we saw that the prophet Eliaj told the king that there would be a terrible drought because of the way he and the whole nation sinned against God.

Three years later God told Elijah that these people had had enough of the drought, and that He was going to send rain again. He wanted Elijah to go to King Ahab and bring him the good

news.

In the meantime King Ahab was looking all over to find Elijah, because he still wanted to kill him for bringing this drought over Israel. So he had a big surprise when one day suddenly Elijah came to him. King Ahab shouted at Elijah: “You - you are the one that brought death over Israel!”

“No your Majesty,” said Elijah, “not me, it is you that caused the death of so many people, because you refused to worship God. It is because of all your terrible idols that God stopped the rain.”

Then Elijah said to King Ahab: “I want you to call all the people of Israel to come together at the Carmel mountain. You must also tell all the prophets of your Baäl-god to be there, then we will decide who is the true God!”

Ahab was happy, because he was quite confident that his god, Baäl was a powerful god. So on the set day everybody in Israel got together at the mountain. There were thousands and thousands of people. There were also 850 prophets of Baäl and Asjera, another of their idols, and just one lonely prophet of God, Elijah.

So Elijah spoke to all the people,

and he said to them: “Today we are going to decide which is the true God. If you still think that Baäl is your god after today, then you follow him. But if you realize that God Almighty is the true God, then you must leave the other gods and worship God only.”

So Elijah told them to bring two bulls. His instructions were that the bulls be slaughtered and cut up. The prophets of Baäl had to put their bull on their altar as an offering to their god. Elijah would do the same to his bull. But then came the difficult part: nobody was allowed to use fire for the offering!

“But how must we make an offering without fire?” they asked him, “This is impossible!”

“Well,” Elijah said, “your god is mighty, isn’t he? Then he must send the fire for the offering. Pray to him and ask him to do it, and I will do the same with my offering to my God. The God who sends the fire is the true God. Do you agree?”

“Oh yes!” they all agreed, because they still thought that their god, Baäl could do that. And they started praying and begging Baäl to send them fire, but nothing happened.

“Pray harder!” Elijah told them, “Maybe he is sleeping, or maybe he is on a journey!” They did not like Elijah mocking them, so they prayed harder and louder, and they started dancing around their altar. They even cut themselves with knives to try and get Baäl’s attention. But still nothing happened - no fire.

Later that afternoon Elijah told them: “This is not working. Let me show you what my God can do!” So he built an altar using 12 big stones. He then dug a trench around the altar. Elijah put firewood on the altar and the meat of the bull on top of that.

Then he told the people: “Bring me lots of water.”

Elijah then took the water and poured it over the bull and the altar and the wood until everything was soaking wet. The water even filled the trench around the altar. Then Elijah prayed and asked God to show the people who the true God was. He asked God to show them that He was God, and to touch their hearts so that they would repent their sins and once again believe in Him and follow and worship Him as God.

As soon as Elijah started praying, the miracle happened. There was

not a single cloud in the sky, but the next moment, out of the clear blue sky came fire. A blinding white flame came down on Elijah's altar and set the wood alight. The fire was so intense that it burned the meat to fine ashes in seconds. It even destroyed the big rocks, so that there was nothing left of it, and the water in the trench around the altar simply evaporated from the intense heat.

It was an awesome spectacle! The people just stood there in total amazement. Then they all agreed: "The Lord is God! Now we know that He is the only true

God!” Then they grabbed all the prophets of Baäl and killed them, because they tried to mislead the people of Israel and got them to worship dead idols.

After all this, Elijah climbed to the top of the mountain and prayed to God. He told God that these people had now turned back to Him, and he asked God to please send rain so that the country could return to normal. Eventually Elijah saw a tiny little cloud in the sky. Then he quickly ran down the mountain and he told King Ahab to get onto his wagon and hurry back home, because there was a huge rainstorm coming up.

King Ahab looked to the sky, but all he could see was one tiny little cloud! “Hurry!” Elijah told him. And King Ahab obeyed him and got on his wagon. Within minutes the whole sky was filled with dark clouds, and the king drove his horses to their maximum because he was scared of this huge storm. But the next thing he saw was the old man, Elijah coming from behind. His long grey beard was blowing in the wind as he ran right past the king, even faster than the king’s horses.

For the people of Israel it was almost too late. Just in time they realised who the true God was.

For so many people today it is also almost too late. There is still only one God! You and I know that we cannot worship any other God. And we cannot worship our ancestors. That is very wrong in God's eyes.

But so many of our friends living amongst us and our relatives still don't know the true God. They still worship the spirits of their ancestors, and that is just as wrong as the things that the Israelites were doing. We must go and tell them about the only true God, because we do not want to see them going to hell. We want them to be in heaven with us one

day. Let's be brave like Elijah and tell our friends about Jesus!

John the Baptist

Luke 1:8-17

In the time that King Herod the Great was the ruler over Israel, there lived an old man by the name of Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth in a small town in the mountains of Judea. Zechariah and Elizabeth were very good people and they loved God very much. Zechariah was a priest, and from time to time he worked in the temple in Jerusalem. These two old people never had any children.

One morning old Zechariah went to the temple as usual. This was

one of those special days, and there were lots of people outside the temple busy praying. Zechariah went inside and he started to burn some incense so that the temple could be filled with the beautiful perfume.

Suddenly, when Zechariah looked up, he saw someone standing in front of him. He got a big fright, because he was supposed to be the only one inside the temple, and he never saw anybody else coming through the doorway. But that was not all - this man looked very strange, almost like he was not from earth!

The strange man saw that

Zechariah was scared, so he told him: “Don’t be afraid, I have come to bring you good news: You and Elizabeth have been praying for many years to have a baby. God heard your prayer - you will have a child, and you must name him John.”

The man also told Zechariah that this child will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and that he would lead many people to God. Then he said something very strange: he said that when John was grown up, he would get people ready for God. What exactly did he mean?

Of course Zechariah did not

understand it. He could also not believe that this was possible. Have you ever heard of a seventy year old gogo having a baby? So he asked the man: “Why should I believe you? I am an old man and my wife is very old as well.” People at their age simply do not have babies!

Then the man said to Zechariah: “I am Gabriel, the angel of God. God sent me to give you this good news. But because you did not believe me, you will be unable to speak until the day your child is born.”

In the meantime the crowd of people outside were still waiting

for Zechariah and they were getting impatient. They were wondering what was keeping him so long? Finally when he came walking out, everybody could see that something very weird had happened to him. He wanted to tell them about the angel, but poor Zechariah could not speak a single word. He waved his arms and made funny signs to show them that he could not speak. And then the people realised that he saw something very strange in the temple.

Not long after that, the big miracle happened: Elizabeth, the old gogo, became pregnant. These

two old people were very, very happy.

Nine months later, in the little town in Judea where Zechariah and Elizabeth lived, there was great joy. All the women were running around chatting and babbling about the happening of the century: Elizabeth's baby was due to be born. Nobody could believe that this could actually happen to this old Gogo. WOW!

Zechariah was also jumping up and down with excitement, but still he could not even make a sound. Then the big moment came, and from inside Elizabeth's bedroom there came the sound of

a baby crying. The whole town exploded with joy and people were dancing and singing. Then someone asked Zechariah: “What are you going to call him?” Zechariah took a slate and then he wrote the name “**JOHN**”. At that very moment his voice came back. And for the first time in nine months Zechariah could speak again. God kept His promise.

Thirty years went by, and the little boy John became a man. He loved God very much and he studied the Bible and learned about God. Then he did a strange thing: he went to live in the desert for some time. He did it so that he

could be alone with God and so that the Holy Spirit could give him strength and wisdom. There was no food, and John had to live off grasshoppers and wild honey that he collected in the desert.

Then finally the day came that John was ready, and he started preaching to the people. He told them that they were sinners, and that they did not do what God wanted them to do. They had to apologise to God about their bad lives. In other words, they had to repent. This also meant that they had to turn away from that sinful life, and they had to start following God. Then John

baptized them in the river Jordan as a token that God washed away their sins.

John was not afraid to tell people the truth. Once he told the king that he was living in sin because he took his brother's wife for himself. That made the king so angry that he had John arrested and locked in prison. Later John was killed, his head was cut off simply because he spoke the truth.

But John also told the people about the Messiah. He said that this Messiah that they had been waiting for all those years was here right now! John explained

that he (John) was only the guy that paved the way to get things ready for the Messiah so that He could come to do what God had planned. Thousands and thousands of people followed John and listened to him preaching.

And now the stage was set for the biggest event that ever happened in the history of the world - the coming of the Messiah!

In the meantime thirty years before John started preaching, in the town of Nazareth there lived a beautiful young girl by the name of Mary. She was engaged to a carpenter called Joseph, and they

were planning to get married.

And then one day an incredible thing happened to her. She was visited by the angel Gabriel, the very same angel who visited Zechariah.

But next time I will tell you all about this visit!

Mary and the Angel

Luke 2:1-7

In a small town called Nazareth, there lived a young girl by the name of Mary. She was only 14 years old, and she was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter. One day young Mary got a terrible fright when suddenly a very strange man stood before her. He greeted her and he said to her: **“Shalom! Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!”** This was no ordinary man but the angel, Gabriel.

Mary was scared because she

did not know what this was all about. Gabriel told her: **“Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!”**

Mary was confused: “This is impossible! I am not married, I am a virgin. How can this be?”

Gabriel explained to her that the

Holy Spirit would come over her. God was Personally going to put this Child in her womb. He also explained that this Child was very, very special, and that He was holy, because He was actually the Son of God.

Mary did not understand this at all, but she told the angel that she was willing to be God's servant.

After this encounter with the angel, Mary went to Joseph and told him everything. She also told him that she was pregnant with this very special child from God.

Do you think Joseph was happy? No, he did not quite believe

Mary's story, and he decided to break the engagement. Then one night Joseph had a strange dream. He dreamed that there was an angel who came down from heaven. He told Joseph that everything Mary said was true, and that he must not break the engagement. He had to take Mary as his wife.

And that is how the wonderful story of the birth of Jesus started. We all know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a little town near Jerusalem. It is also the town where the great King David was born. But Joseph and Mary did not live in Bethlehem. They lived

in Nazareth, a long way from Bethlehem. How did it then happen that Jesus was born in Bethlehem?

It was part of God's great plan that Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem. Some 500 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophets already foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

So, we see that God said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. The question is: how would God get Mary to travel all the way to Bethlehem for the birth of her baby?

The second part of our story takes us to the big city of Rome, thousands of kilometers away. There was a very important man, the emperor, Caesar Augustus. He was the wicked ruler of the entire Roman Empire.

One day Augustus decided that he wanted to know exactly how many people there were in his mighty kingdom. He wanted a census taken of all the people. The way it would work, was that on a certain date everybody in the whole Roman empire had to go to the town where their ancestors were born. There they would be counted.

Joseph's ancestor was the famous king David. And David was born in the small town of Bethlehem. Therefore Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem for this census at about the same time that Mary's Baby was to be born.

Joseph packed his donkey, and they went on their way. Mary was sitting on the donkey and Joseph was walking. It was a hundred kilometers to Bethlehem, a long way to walk, and for a nine months pregnant woman on a donkey, this was no joke!

Four full days they travelled over dangerous desert mountain

passes and rough roads. At long last they saw the town of Bethlehem, and Joseph thought: “Aah, tonight we can sleep in a nice soft bed in a cosy guest house!”

But he was in for a big surprise, because when they got there, they just saw people everywhere. Thousands of people came to this town for the census. He was looking for a place to stay, but everywhere he asked, the people just told him: “Sorry, there is no room for you here!”

Eventually somebody said to Joseph: “My house is full, but if you want to sleep in my stable, it

is fine with me. That is the only place left.”

So they went down into the stable. Have you ever been inside a stable? What does it smell like? What do you see on the floor? Persian carpets? No! It does not smell good – it stinks! It is dirty, and there is dung all over the place. The stable that Joseph and Mary got, was just like any other stable. But they had no choice.

Just then Mary started feeling cramps in her body, and she knew that the Baby was on His way. In a crib where the animals got their food, she prepared a little place for the Baby to sleep.

And then the King of all kings was born, in a dirty stable, with no doctor or midwife to even help them with the delivery of their precious Baby.

Today we are the people of Bethlehem. Sometimes Jesus comes to us, and He says to us that He wants to stay with us. And then we say to Him “No sorry Lord, but I do not have a room for You at the moment.”

There are many ways to refuse Jesus in your life. The first way is to simply say that you don't need Jesus in your life.

Sometimes you may want to go to

a place where Jesus will not be welcome, or where you do not want Jesus to go with you. It may be a place like a shebeen where people get drunk and where they use drugs or where you gamble. Then you are actually saying to Jesus: “Lord, you stay in the stable because I am ashamed to have You here with me.”

Or sometimes you do things that you do not want Jesus to see. If you take something that does not belong to you, then you are sinning, and how can you ask Jesus to be part of your crime? Then you are actually telling Him that there is no room for Him.

Sometimes we say things that we do not want Jesus to hear. If you use bad language and swear words, how can you do that in the presence of Jesus? If you tell dirty jokes, how can you do that if you know that Jesus is standing next to you? If you say bad things about other people, or gossip about them, then you cannot have Jesus in your presence. Then you are actually telling Him that you do not have a place for Him in your life at that moment.

If you do not do the things that God wants you to do, then you do not have a room for Jesus in your life. If you do not love God with all

your heart and show love to your fellow people, then there is no room for Jesus.

Today I want to ask you this question: Do you really have room for Jesus in your life at all times?

Or are you like the people of Bethlehem, who said “Go away! There is no room for You here!” Or maybe you say: “I have room for Jesus, as long as He stays down in the stable!”

If we really care for Jesus, then we must have Him right here in our hearts where everybody can see Him. And we must proudly

show him to everybody!

No Place for Jesus?

Matthew 1:18-25

We heard the three wonderful stories about the young girl Mary who had a visit from the angel Gabriel. He told her that she was going to have a very special baby. The second story was about the horrible ruler of the Roman Empire, Ceasar Augustus and his census. And the third story was about the wonderful dream of Joseph. He had a dream about an angel visiting him, and the angel told him to take Mary as his wife.

And then these three stories

came together when Joseph and the nine months pregnant Mary saddled up their donkey to go to Bethlehem for the census.

Do you like listening to stories? The Zulu people are great story tellers. I love listening to their stories, especially if it is an old gogo or madala who is telling it. But now we continue our wonderful story.

750 Years before this all happened, God told a prophet named Micah to tell the people of Israel that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But he was not the only prophet who spoke about Jesus. At about the same

time another prophet named Isaiah wrote these words in Isaiah 7:14: **“A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Immanuel”** He also wrote in Isaiah 9:5,6 : **“A child is born to us! A son is given to us! And he will be our ruler. He will be called: ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.’”**

Who was he talking about? Jesus! And now the time had come for the Baby of Joseph and Mary to be born. But they lived in Nazareth – far away from Bethlehem. But, as you know, they had to go to Bethlehem for

this census. And of course Joseph was not a very happy man, because the birth of their baby was due exactly in the time that they would be in Bethlehem. But it is very important that we realise that God had planned this to happen exactly like it did happen.

Joseph packed his donkey, and they got on their way. Mary was sitting on the donkey and Joseph was walking. It was a hundred kilometers to Bethlehem - a long way to walk. It was like from here to Empangeni. And for a nine months pregnant woman on a donkey, this was no joke!

Four full days they travelled over dangerous desert mountain passes and rough roads. At long last they saw the town of Bethlehem, and Joseph thought: “Aah, tonight we can sleep in a nice soft bed in a cosy guest house!”

But he was in for a big surprise, because when they got there, they just saw people everywhere. Thousands of people came to this town for the census. He was looking for a place to stay, but everywhere he asked, the people just told him: “Sorry, there is no place for you here!”

Maybe they saw the heavily

pregnant Mary, and they thought: “Eisch! This is big trouble! We do not want strangers in our house - especially not a woman who will give birth any moment now!”

There was nowhere in the town where they could sleep, and Joseph was getting very worried, because this trip was not good for Mary, and it looked like their baby could be born any time now.

Eventually somebody said to Joseph: “My house is full, but if you want to sleep in my stable, it is fine with me. That is the only place left.”

So they went down into the

stable. Have you ever been inside a stable? What does it smell like? What do you see on the floor? Persian carpets? No! It does not smell good – it stinks! It is dirty, and there is dung all over the place. The stable that Joseph and Mary got, was just like any other stable. But they had no choice.

Just then Mary started feeling cramps in her body, and she knew that the Baby was on His way. In a crib where the animals got their food, she prepared a little place for the Baby to sleep.

And then the King of all kings was born, in a dirty stable, with no doctor or midwife to even help

them with the delivery of their precious Baby.

You and me are the people of Bethlehem today. Sometimes Jesus comes to us, and He says to us that He wants to stay with us. And then we say to Him “No sorry Lord, but I do not have a place for You at the moment.”

Maybe you will say to me that I am talking nonsense, because you have never refused Jesus!

There are many ways to refuse Jesus in your life. The first way is to simply say that you don't need Jesus in your life. I am sure that nobody here today will say that.

But there are other, more subtle ways to refuse him.

Sometimes you may want to go to a place where Jesus will not be welcome, or where you do not want Jesus to go with you. It may be a place like a shebeen where people get drunk and where they use drugs or where you gamble. Then you are actually saying to Jesus: “Lord, you stay in the stable because I am ashamed to have You here with me.”

Or sometimes you do things that you do not want Jesus to see. If you take something that does not belong to you, then you are sinning, and how can you ask

Jesus to be part of your crime? Then you are actually telling Him that there is no place for Him.

Sometimes we say things that we do not want Jesus to hear. If you use bad language and swear words, how can you do that in the presence of Jesus? If you tell dirty jokes, how can you do that if you know that Jesus is standing next to you? If you say bad things about other people, or gossip about them, then you cannot have Jesus in your presence. Then you are actually telling Him that you do not have a place for Him in your life at that moment.

If you do not do the things that

God wants you to do, then you do not have a place for Jesus in your life. If you do not love God with all your heart and show love to your fellow people, then there is no place for Jesus.

Today I want to ask you this question: Do you really have place for Jesus in your life at all times?

Or are you like the people of Bethlehem, who said “Go away! There is no place for You here!” Or maybe you say: “I have place for Jesus, as long as He stays down in the stable!”

If we really care for Jesus, then

we must have Him right here in our hearts where everybody can see Him. And we must proudly show him to everybody!

The Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:8-15

We are still busy with the beautiful story of the birth of Jesus. It started with Zachariah and Elizabeth, the two old people. God gave them a baby in their old age, and this baby became a mighty prophet who told people that the Messiah had arrived. He prepared the way for Jesus.

We also heard the story of Joseph and Mary. The Angel told Mary that she would become pregnant, even though she was a virgin. God would personally put this child inside her, and that this

Baby was the Son of God.

We heard the story of Ceasar Augustus who planned a census, and Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem for this census, right at the time when her baby was to be born.

All these stories came together one night, when Mary gave birth to her baby. This was the biggest event of all times! Remember, they could not find any place to stay in Bethlehem. The only place they could find to sleep, was a stable. And this is where everything happened, in this dirty stable.

That night the awesome wonder happened: The King of all kings was born - not in a palace lined with gold, but in a dirty, stinking stable. There was cow dung and goats' droppings all over the place. But Joseph and Mary did not mind, because they had a place to stay, and a roof over their heads when their Baby was born. Mary wrapped her precious Baby in cloths, and she laid Him down in a manger - a troth where the animals got their food.

In the meantime, out in the fields near Bethlehem, there were some men sitting around a small fire. They were talking about the

things that had happened to them that day. They were shepherds, and they were watching over their flocks of sheep, so that no jackals or other predators would catch their sheep.

Suddenly something very extraordinary happened to them. There was a very strange man that appeared from nowhere. They could see that this was no ordinary man - he was very different, with shining clothes and face. They did not know what was happening, and they were frightened. It seemed as if everything was shining around them - there was a strange light-

glow - like the glory of God shining on them. Then the man said to them: **“Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Saviour was born, Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**

Then they realised: **This is an angel!** They were still wondering about the message that he gave them, when something awesome happened: Suddenly, it was like the heaven was torn open, and there was a huge choir of angels

in the heaven - there were thousands and thousands of angels. And they sang the most beautiful song that was ever heard: **“Glory to God, Glory to God in the highest. And peace on earth!”**

These shepherds just stood there in utter amazement. The heavenly music filled the air all around them, and they stood listening to the biggest performance that was ever heard. And they - these simple shepherds - were the only people in the audience - the only people that ever heard this awesome song. After a while, the angels disappeared back into

heaven, and the shepherds stood there, absolutely speechless. They could not believe what had just happened to them.

Then they said to each other: **“Let’s go! Let’s go and find that Baby that the Angel told us about!”** And they all started running towards the town of Bethlehem to go and find the Saviour, Christ the Lord - the One who was born that night. They ran into the town, and they asked the people: **“Where is the Baby that was born tonight?”** And somebody told them: **“Oh, I heard that there was a Baby born in a stable. Shame.....”** Then the

shepherds told everybody: **“We saw angels! And the angels said that this baby is the Messiah, the Son of God! And the angels sang! There were millions of angels. We must go and see the Baby!”** They found the Baby in the stable, just like the angel told them and they knelt before Him. Everybody in Bethlehem heard the shepherds’ story.

In the meantime, in a country far, far away in the East, our group of wise men were still wondering about the strange things they saw in the stars, and the message it gave them about the King that

was to be born.

Then one night they saw a strange star rising from the East - a star that nobody has ever seen before. This star was very bright, and they immediately realised: "If we follow that star, it will show us where this King is." They saddled up their camels and they followed the star all the way to the city of Jerusalem. They thought: "This is the place!" and they went to the beautiful palace of King Herod the Great. But there was no baby in that palace. They could not understand it: "Where can this Baby be? Did we make a mistake somewhere?"

King Herod said to them: “If you find that new king, please come back to me - I want to go and see Him as well!” But he didn’t really want to see Jesus - he wanted to get rid of Him. Later he ordered his soldiers to go out and kill all the babies in the country. He thought in that way Jesus would also be killed.

After the wise men saw King Herod, they saw the star again. Now it was still moving west towards a little town not far from Jerusalem. Then they knew: “That is the place where the King of all kings was born!” And they followed the star to Bethlehem.

When they got to Bethlehem, they asked the people: “Do you know of a Baby that was born?” And of course everybody knew, because the shepherds told them. When these wise men saw Jesus in the stable, they all knelt down before Him. And they gave Him very precious gifts - gold, frankincense and myrrh. These are very precious and expensive spices that came from Ethiopia.

Who were the first people to know about the birth of Jesus? The shepherds, very ordinary people, just like you and me. And what did they do when the angel told them about Jesus? They ran to

see Jesus, but they also told everybody about Him. They were excited to hear about Jesus. They were His first witnesses.

Are you excited about Jesus? God also wants you and me - ordinary people to be His witnesses - to tell people about Jesus.

At Christmas time, we give gifts to other people, just like the wise men brought Jesus gifts. This is to say thank you to God that He gave His Son so that we could have the biggest gift of all: Eternal Life!

The Boy In the Temple

Luke 2:41-52

The Bible tells us very little about the childhood of Jesus. We hear the Christmas story, and the next thing we see Him as a grown Man.

What we do know, is that the wise men told the evil King Herod The Great about this new King who was born. Herod was scared that Jesus would rob him of his kingdom, but he didn't know where to find the Baby Jesus. So he gave his soldiers an order to kill all the baby boys in Israel. In that way Jesus would also be killed.

But God warned Joseph about Herod's plans, so Joseph and Mary took their baby and they fled to Egypt. They stayed there until King Herod died. Then they returned to Israel to the town of Nazareth.

Joseph taught Jesus about God and about the Bible from the time he was a small boy. And Jesus listened very carefully. And he learned!

Every year at Easter time, there was a very big festival in Jerusalem. All the Jewish people from all over the world went to Jerusalem to take part in the Easter festival.

When Jesus was a young boy of twelve years old, Joseph and Mary decided to go to this festival. It was a long way to Jerusalem from Nazareth – 5 full days of walking to get there. All the people from Nazareth gathered together to travel in a big group for this happy occasion. There must have been a few hundred people together, singing and dancing all the way. And the children were playing games. They were excited to go to Jerusalem!

When they got to Jerusalem, everybody camped outside the city. There were thousands of

people. Every day they went up to the Temple to pray to God. This festival lasted more than a week.

At last they were finished, and all the people started packing up to take the long trip home. Mary and Joseph also packed up. They could not see their Son Jesus anywhere, but they were not worried, because all the children of the group were playing together - He had to be somewhere among the bunch of children.

And so they started their journey home, to Nazareth. That night they made their camp somewhere along the way. Still they did not

see Jesus, but they thought that He was with one of His friends or with a relative. So the next morning they continued their journey to Nazareth. But then Mary started worrying. She asked around, but nobody had seen Jesus, not even His friends.

Mary went to Joseph, and she told him that Jesus was missing, and that she couldn't find him anywhere. "We must go back to Jerusalem!" she pleaded with Joseph. I don't think that Joseph was very happy, because they were two days away from Jerusalem already. But they turned around to go and find their

Son.

When they got to Jerusalem the next day, they searched all over, but He was nowhere to be found. They were só worried - what could have happened to their Son? It was already 3 days since they last saw Him!

“The Temple is the only place where we haven’t looked!” Mary told Joseph.

“No, Surely He wouldn’t be there! What would a twelve year old boy do in the Temple?”

“Please Joseph, that’s our last hope. Please let’s go look in the Temple.....”

And so Joseph and Mary walked up to the Temple. And surely, there Jesus was, surrounded by a whole bunch of Rabbi's and priests and grey-haired wise old men who study the Bible.

Joseph was angry. He shouted at Jesus to come immediately. "Why did You do this to us? Do You realise how worried we were about You? Where were You all the time?"

Then Jesus answered them: "Why were you looking for Me? Didn't you know that I had to be in the house of My Father?"

Of course Joseph and Mary did

not know what Jesus was talking about. But the wise old men came to them, and they told Joseph and Mary that they could not believe the wisdom of this young Boy. He seemed to know everything about the Bible, and He understood the meaning of everything. They were surprised about His wide knowledge of God.

Then they went back to Nazareth, their home town.

This is a lovely story. But it is much, much more than just a story!

The first thing that we learn, is that there is no way that a simple

man like Joseph could teach a young boy so much about the Bible and about God, that even the most learned men in all of Israel were dumbfounded by His knowledge. There is only one explanation for this: **Jesus is God**. He was God, even when He was still only a little boy. He was God when He taught thousands of people about the Gospel, and did the most awesome miracles. And He is still God today, where He is on the throne, ruling over the universe.

The second thing that we learn from this story, is that there is a very special relationship between

Jesus and The Father. When He tells Joseph and Mary that He had to be in the house of His Father, God, it means He wanted to be with the Father, and that he wanted to learn and know everything about the Father.

In the same way, it is very important for you and me to really know God personally and to have a special relationship with God. Do you really know God? Do you know Him personally? Do you have a relationship with Him?

If I ask you today if you know President Zuma, you would all say “Yes!”

But do you really know him? Have you ever met him? No! Then you don't really know him! If you ask me if I know Petro, then I would say "Yes!" Why? Because there is a special relationship between us. We pray together, and I can tell her about the things that make me happy. We help each other - I will do things for her, and she for me.

Do you know God? Many people say they know God, but they don't, because there is no personal relationship between them and God. If you have a relationship with God, then you will want to know everything

about Him, like Jesus did. Then you will want to do things for Him because you love Him. But you will also read and study the Bible, the Word of God so that you can know more and more about this wonderful God who has a relationship with you.

The First Disciples

Matthew 4:18-25

One day a certain Doctor Luke started writing a book about Jesus. He spoke to all the people who knew Jesus personally, like Mary. She told him the wonderful story about Jesus, when He was a boy of 12 and that this Boy taught the wise old men in the Temple about the Bible.

Luke also spoke to the great Apostle Peter and he asked him how it came about that he started following Jesus.

“Oh, that was a long, long time ago.” Peter said to Luke. “You

know that I was a fisherman by trade? Me and my brother Andrew had a boat and we were fishing for a living. Rough guys, we were! Every day when everyone else was still sleeping, we went out on the sea to go fishing with our nets.”

“Then one day we heard a strange story. That was in the time of John the Baptist, the guy who was preaching and baptising all the people. Some strange Man came to John and asked him to baptise Him. His name was Jesus, a carpenter from the town of Nazareth. They say that something very strange

happened when John baptised Jesus. The heaven suddenly opened above Him and a voice came out of heaven saying: “This is My beloved Son. I have great joy in Him.” It was the voice of God as Jesus was anointed for His huge task on earth. Then a white dove came from nowhere and landed on Him. The people who were there said that it was the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. I could not quite believe it at that time.

Later I heard that Jesus walked into the desert and stayed there for forty days without any food. If you get a huge task, you cannot

just jump in and start doing it, you must prepare yourself properly for it. It was the same with Jesus. The way He prepared Himself was to go into the desert and stay there alone for forty days. In that whole time He did not eat anything.

If you don't eat anything for forty days, you would surely get hungry. And so did Jesus. But this was something that He had to do, no matter what!

The devil knew exactly what Jesus was doing, and he would do anything to stop Jesus. When he saw that Jesus was very hungry, he came to Him and said

to Him: “Why do You mistreat Yourself like this? You don't have to be hungry! All You have to do is to tell these rocks to become bread. You can do it! You are the Son of God, aren't You?”

But Jesus ignored the devil. He told him that you cannot live from bread alone, you can only live through the Word of God.

Later the devil brought Jesus to the top of the temple, and he told Him: “Jump down! God will send His angels to save You!”

Jesus answered him: “The Bible says that you must not tempt God!”

The devil tried a third time to tempt Jesus. He took Him to a high mountain and he showed Jesus all the different nations of the earth. Then he said to Jesus that he would give Him all these people and all the kingdoms of the earth if Jesus would worship him. Then Jesus answered him: “Go away Satan! God is the only One that anyone should worship!”

“I heard all these wonderful things about Jesus, and I said to my brother Andrew that I really wanted to meet this strange man, Jesus. And then just that happened! After His forty days in the desert, Jesus went to live in

Capernaum at the sea of Galilea. That is where we lived too at that time. Jesus started preaching and telling the people about the Kingdom of God.

One day while Andrew and I were busy casting our nets, we saw Jesus walking on the beach. Some people were following Him and listening to what He was teaching them. Then the wonderful thing happened. Jesus came walking straight to me and my brother and He said to us: “Come with Me. If you follow Me, I will make you fishers of men.”

No fisherman in his right frame of mind will just leave his nets on

the beach and go after a strange Man. But we did just that! At that moment I simply knew that it was the right thing to do.

While we were still walking down the beach, we saw our three friends, Zebedee and his two sons James and John sitting their boat, busy fixing their nets for that evening's big fishing trip. Jesus called the two brothers: "Come with Me!" They did not even think twice. They left their father to carry on with the nets and they joined us.

This was the beginning of a great adventure for the four of us. From that day we followed Jesus for the

next three years. Eventually there were eight more guys who joined us, and we stayed with Jesus day and night while He trained us to become fishermen of a different kind, “fishers of men.”

Of course we were not the only people who followed Jesus. He was a great Teacher, and everybody loved listening to Him as He taught us about the Kingdom of God. There were many people who followed Him and became His disciples. Every day they would come to listen to His teachings. Our group of twelve had the great task of organising the crowds.

Sometimes there were thousands of people who came to listen to Him.”

What would you do if a strange person comes to you where you are busy doing your job, and he tells you to come with him? I know what I would do: “Can't you see I am busy working? I can't simply leave everything. My boss would fire me! Let me first finish my task, then I will see if I can spare some time to go with you.”

Today Jesus still calls people to follow Him. He called me to follow Him and He called Petro and Chris and Maria. That is why we are here every Saturday to do

what He asked us to do.

When Jesus called His disciples, He did not just leave them with their task. He started by teaching them what to do, and He was with them all the time to help them.

Today Jesus is calling every one of you guys for some task. I do not know what His calling is for you, but you will know. Maybe it is simply to be a friend for somebody in need. The question is, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to say: “No Lord, I am scared to do what you ask of me”? Or: “I am too busy with my own life. Maybe later.....” Or are you going to do what Peter

and his friends did and leave everything, to trust God and follow Him?

The choice is yours.

Sowing Seeds

Mark 4:1-8

Early one morning Jesus and His disciples were walking on the beach of the sea of Galilea. People came from all over to hear Jesus speak, until there was a huge crowd gathered around Him. Jesus realised that nobody was going to hear Him. There were just too many people. So He jumped into a fishing boat that was lying on the shore, and the men pushed the boat into the water, so that Jesus could sit in it and talk to them.

In the distance Jesus could see a

farmer busy working in his fields. A young boy was walking behind a couple of oxen with a plough. There were some big rocks in the field, and the boy was struggling with the plough around the rocks. Behind him, the farmer was walking with a big leather bag slung from his shoulder. As he was walking, he dipped his hand into the bag, grabbed a handful of seeds, and then he scattered the seeds around him.

Then Jesus said to Peter: “I wonder how many of those seeds ever reach good soil?”

Peter did not know what Jesus was talking about. “Master,” he

said, with a big question mark on his face “what do you mean?”

And then Jesus started telling the people a story: He told them that once there was a farmer who was busy sowing seeds.

Everybody went quiet, for they loved listening to good stories.

Then Jesus told them how this farmer was walking through his field, sowing the seeds around him. But there was a problem: this field had many big rocks all over, and there was a road going through the field. And on the side of the field there were all kinds of weeds growing.

As the farmer was sowing, not all the seeds fell on good soil: some of the seeds fell on the rocks, some seeds fell on the road, and some seeds fell between the weeds.

Then Jesus explained that the seeds that fell on the road, were quickly picked up by birds. They ate those seeds, and of course the seeds were lost for the farmer. They would never grow.

Some seeds fell on the rocky soil where there was only a little bit of soil on the rocks. Those seeds started growing, but there was just not enough soil, and when the sun started baking the earth,

the tiny little plants died.

Some of the seeds that he was scattering, fell between the weeds. The seeds started growing, but there were just too many weeds. The weeds choked the little plants, and they also died.

But the good news is, that some of the seeds fell in good soil. They grew up to become big plants, and there was a big harvest at the end of the season.

Now that was a lovely story, but a story without a message means nothing. What was the message behind this story?

Jesus explained that the seed was actually the Gospel, the good news. And the sower is the person who tells people about this good news. Some of the people who hear his message are like a road. They don't even want to listen. This message does not enter into their hearts.

Some people that hear his message are like rocky soil. They listen and they say: "Aah yes! I think that maybe I should also follow Jesus!" But a few days later they forget everything, and they just carry on living as they did before. The message of the gospel did not make any

difference to their lives.

Another group of people that hear the message are like a patch of soil riddled with weeds. The soil is good and they accept the gospel, but there is so much sin in their lives that they won't get rid of, that the sin chokes the good news to death.

This sounds very sad! It sounds like all the hard work of this sower of the gospel is for nothing!

But there is good news! There are also the people that hear and accept the gospel, and they do what God wants them to do.

Now there are two sides of this

story. In the first side we must decide what our soil is like. Are we like the soil with weeds? Or the rocky soil? Or are we the good soil Jesus was talking about? You must decide for yourself.

I would like to believe that all of us here today are people who are like that good soil. Does that mean that we can sit back and be satisfied! Is that really what Jesus wanted to tell us today?

No! There is another message in today's story. Jesus actually wanted to say to us that you and I are actually the sowers. Yes, you heard correctly. We are not only

the good soil, but He wants each one of us to be the sowers!

What does a sower do? He sows seeds. Jesus wants us to sow the seeds of the gospel. We must tell other people about Jesus.

How do you sow seeds? There are many different ways. One way is to talk to someone about Jesus. Another way is also to live in such a way that people can see Jesus in your life. Help people in need. Comfort somebody who lost a loved one. Be there for somebody who is sad. Be friendly. Be joyful!

In this story Jesus warns us that

when we sow the seeds of the gospel, there will be bad patches. He says that some people won't even listen to us. But we must not worry about that. We must keep on sowing!

He wants us to know, that some of the people that we tell the good news to, will say to us: "Hallelujah!" but a few days later, they will just disappear. But we must not worry about that. We must keep on sowing!

Some of the people that we tell the good news to, will tell us: "Yes, we will accept Jesus as our Saviour!" but they are not prepared to leave their sins

behind. They will not grow spiritually, and eventually their faith will die.

But we must not worry about all the people rejecting God's Good News. We must simply keep on sowing! Somebody will accept our message, and he will be the good fertile soil. And when he has grown spiritually, he will also become a sower.

In short: Keep on sowing! One day your seeds **WILL** fall on fertile soil!

Dirty Feet

John 13:1-17

One day Jesus was having supper with Peter and the other disciples. It was the day before the passover, and they were all lying around a table. In those years, people did not sit on chairs at a table, they would lie on cushions, leaning on their elbows. All would lie in the same direction, so that the feet of the person sitting next to you are almost in your face. Do you think that would be very pleasant? Especially if his feet are dirty? Maybe he stepped in something very smelly!

Therefore every time people had a meal together, a slave would come and wash everybody's feet. This surely was not a very nice job! So it was always the job of the person with the lowest rank to do this dirty job – the poor slave!

As you know by now, Jesus and His disciples were poor people - they could not afford to buy a slave to do their dirty work, so they had to sit at the table with dirty feet and just bear the smell.

But that particular day, something very strange happened. While they were sitting around the table, the Master, Jesus stood up. He took off His shirt, and then He

took a towel and tied it around His waist. By now all eyes were on Him. What was He going to do? Next He took a washbasin and He poured water into it. Now everybody was wondering: What WAS Jesus doing!?! They could not understand what was going on.

Jesus got down on His knees and He started washing the feet of the first disciple. The poor guy got such a fright that he could not even speak. His Master was doing the dirty work of a simple slave! For three years they had been learning from Him about God and how to treat other

people and how to live the way God wants you to live. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that He was the highest Authority on earth and in heaven.

But now He was doing the dirty work that nobody else wanted to do!

When Jesus was finished washing his feet, He went to the next guy, and He started washing his feet as well. Everybody was getting very uncomfortable. This was definitely not the way that they were taught. Your Master does not wash your feet – you wash His feet!

When Jesus got to Peter, he was not happy that his Master would wash his feet. “Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?” he asked Jesus.

Then Jesus answered him:

“Peter, you don’t understand now what I am doing, but one day you will understand.”

Peter said: “**NO** Lord! **Never!** I will **NOT** let You wash my feet!”

Have you ever seen a stubborn donkey that refuses to walk? You can do what you like - you can pull him; you can hit him. But he won’t walk! Well, Peter was like that stubborn donkey. But if you

take a nice juicy carrot, and you hold it in front of a donkey's nose, he will walk to get the carrot. Jesus had to hold a “carrot” for Peter. He said to Peter: **“If I do not wash your feet, you will no longer be my disciple.”**

Poor old Peter got the fright of his life when he heard this. Of course he still wanted to be a disciple of Jesus! He did not want to lose the most precious thing in his life!

“OK Lord, if that is the case, then please also wash my head and my hands!” Peter still did not quite understand what this was all about.

“No Peter, that is not necessary”, Jesus told Peter. And then He explained what it was all about. It was a symbolic action. Jesus was their Master and their Lord, but He was not too important to wash their feet. He wanted to show them that He was willing to be a lowly slave for them. No task was too unimportant for Him. He did not say: “I am the Master and you are the pupils - you must do the dirty work!” No, He was willing to do the dirty work Himself. He did not raise Himself above His pupils.

Then he told them, that in the same way, they had to go and

wash each other's feet. This does not mean that they had to actually go and wash feet - it means that each one of them had to be humble and not raise themselves above anyone else.

Not long before this incident Jesus told Peter that he was a rock, and that the whole church would be built on this rock. That made Peter very important. But what Jesus just said to them, is that even the very important Peter was not more important than any other Christian-believer.

Maybe I could say that I am very important, because I am teaching you guys all these things. Am I

really more important than you? Maybe just a little step higher than you? No. As Christian-believers we are all equal. Even the high and mighty Pope is not more important than you or me.

When Jesus told the guys that they had to wash each other's feet, He actually meant that they had to serve each other. And exactly the same goes for me and you as well. We must serve each other.

Today I am actually serving you. When I teach you every Saturday, I am not your master or Pastor - all I am doing is giving you a service. In the same way Petro is

serving you by playing the guitar and leading the singing. Sarie, Chris and Maria are also serving - they are running around, preparing all the things in the kitchen and washing the dishes.

In that way we must serve each other. Why? It is not our job! But we are doing this because we love serving people.

Why do we love doing this?

Because Jesus said that we must love one another. We don't serve you because the church gave us this task to serve you. We serve you because we love you, and we want you to get all the knowledge

about God. And for the same reason you must also serve each other because you love each other. By serving, we live out the love of Jesus.

Nicodemus

John 3:1-21

One day a very important man heard about Jesus. His name was Nicodemus, and he was a Pharisee and also a member of the Jewish Council. He had some questions that he wanted to ask Jesus, but he was scared to go to Jesus, because if his friends saw him with Jesus, he would be in trouble. So Nicodemus waited until it was dark, so that nobody could recognise him, and then he went to Jesus.

He told Jesus that he could see that He was a man of God, and

that he admired Jesus for doing all these wonders. But Jesus immediately knew that this was not really the reason why Nicodemus came to Him. He knew exactly what Nicodemus's problem was, so Jesus said to him: "Nicodemus, if you are not born again, you will never see the Kingdom of God."

Nicodemus was a clever man, but he did not understand what Jesus said. So he asked Jesus: "How is it possible? I am an old man - I cannot go back into my mother's womb and become a baby to be born again?"

So Jesus started explaining to

Nicodemus about the Holy Spirit, and that He gives you a new life just like a mother gives life to her baby. But still Nicodemus did not understand.

Do you know what Jesus was trying to say to Nicodemus? Let me explain: What happens when a baby is born? The mother grows the baby inside her womb. The baby does not have to do anything. After nine months she gives birth to a brand new baby. In the same way the Holy Spirit will take your spirit and start forming a brand new person. Yes, it is still you, but He makes you completely new, just like a new

baby.

What must a baby do to be born? Must he swim? Does he have to struggle to get out? It sounds very funny, but the point is that the baby does not have to do anything to be born! Who does all the work? Mommy does it all! She is the one who gets morning sickness. She is the one who gets the labour pains. And she is the one who does all the pushing to give birth to the baby. The baby just lies back and enjoys the ride!

In exactly the same way the Holy Spirit is the One who does all the work when you are born again. How does He do it? He works in

many different ways. Most of the time He uses other people as His instruments. He may use a Pastor to give a sermon. Or He might use one of your friends to tell you that Jesus is the only Way to everlasting life. He might even tell somebody to give you a little pamphlet or tract with the gospel message written on it.

Or the Holy Spirit may use YOU to give this message to someone else, using a pamphlet.

The second thing that the Holy Spirit does, is to speak to you when you get the message from someone else. No, you will not normally hear a voice, but you will

just know deep inside your heart that this message you got is from God, and you should obey it. You should open your heart for Jesus and believe in Him.

But there is something else that we should know about tiny babies: When a baby is born, what does the mother do with it? Does she put him down on a bed and leave him to find his own food? Maybe he will start growing up and eat and talk and run around all on his own. In the mean time she can carry on with her life and not worry about the baby!

No? Of course not! From the first

moment she nurtures the baby. She feeds him and looks after him. She gives him lots of love. And when he becomes older, she teaches him to do things, to talk and walk and read and write and throw a ball.

In the same way the Holy Spirit does not just leave you all on your own. He feeds you. When you read the Bible, you get spiritual food. The Holy Spirit talks to you through the Bible, because it is His Book, and in that way He feeds your spirit. He also feeds you when you go to church. Here you get spiritual food that makes you strong so that you can

become an adult Christian. When you are sad or afraid, He comforts you. He teaches you what is right and what is wrong.

Do you know what the first thing is that the Holy Spirit teaches you?

What is the first thing that a baby learns? He learns that Mommy is the one that gave him life. Without Mommy, it would be impossible for him to live.

The Holy Spirit teaches you that Jesus is the One who gave you life. Without Him it would be impossible to have eternal life. When Nicodemus sat there with

Jesus, He told Nicodemus that God loved the world so very much, that He gave His only Son, so that those people who believe in Him will have eternal life.

What does it actually mean? Let me explain:

God hates sin. To sin is to commit an offence that must be punished. If you murder someone, you will be punished. You will be put in jail for many years. With God it is the same. If you sin against God, you will be punished. But God knew that people really battle with sin, so His own Son, Jesus took all the punishment on Himself to pay for the sins of people. He was

punished in a horrible way. He was whipped, beaten, heckled and nailed to a cross. He paid a high price for our sins. But there is a condition: you must believe in Jesus. That is all! He gives eternal life to all those who believe in Him.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? It means that you must put your full trust in Him alone. There is nobody else that can give you eternal life, only Jesus. This also means that you must stop putting your trust in anything or anyone else for eternal life.

- If you still trust some other gods or other spirits, then you

have not yet put your trust in Jesus alone.

- If you still go to the Sangoma to get wisdom, then you trust other spirits, because a Sangoma calls up spirits, he does not call on Jesus. That is the work of the devil! It is witchcraft!
- And if you trust the spirits of your forefathers, then you have not yet put your trust in Jesus alone.

There is only one Saviour, Jesus. Without Him you are lost. With Him, you have eternal life!

The Woman at the Well

John 4:5-18

One day Jesus and His disciples had to travel from Jerusalem to Galilea. There were two roads to Galilea: the long, difficult road over mountains and the easy shortcut through Samaria. The Jews always used the long road, simply because they did not like the Samaritans. They said that Samaritans were not proper Jews, and that they were unclean. The Jews did not even speak to the Samaritans!

Jesus decided that they would use the shortcut. He did not mind

the Samaritans! He loved all people, no matter who they were. It was a long journey and it was hot and dry, and they were hungry and thirsty. They walked past a town called Sychar. Jesus was tired from the long walk, and He sat down at a well on a hill outside the town. He sent His disciples to the town to buy them food.

While He was waiting there, a strange thing happened: Jesus saw a woman walking up the hill to the well to fetch water. The women always came to the well in groups with their friends and they came early in the morning when it

was still cool. But this one came alone, and it was twelve a clock in the afternoon. When she arrived at the well, Jesus asked her: “Please give Me some water.”

The woman looked at Jesus: “What? You are a Jew and You ask me for water? Why? This does not make sense!”

Remember, Jews did not even speak to Samaritans. They were scared that even if a Samaritan’s shadow fell on them, they would get dirty! That is why the woman could not understand why Jesus would ask her for water.

But Jesus was different from all

the other Jews. He did not mind that she was a Samaritan. Then He told her that He could give her something much better than ordinary water: He could give her Living Water.

The woman did not understand what this living water was that Jesus was talking about. So He explained to her that if she drank this living water, she would never get thirsty again. He also told her that this water would bubble out of her like a spring.

Now she was very excited: “**I want that water!**” she told Jesus. “If I get that water, then I will never have to come to this well to

fetch water again! Please, please give me that water!”

Then Jesus said something strange: “Go and call your husband!”

Suddenly the woman’s face dropped: “I don’t have a husband.....”

See, this woman was just living with a man, and Jesus knew that she was living in sin. She had five husbands already.

Suddenly this woman realised that Jesus knew everything about her. He was no ordinary Man. He was something much, much more! Maybe He was a Prophet

or something.

Jesus knew exactly what this woman was thinking. “I am the Messiah” He told her.

The woman was so happy about the things that she had just heard, that she jumped up and ran back to the town as fast as she could. As far as she went, she told everybody what had just happened to her – she met Jesus!

Do you know why this woman came to the well in the middle of the day in the first place? She did it because she did not want to speak to anybody. Because of the

bad life she lived, everybody mocked and scorned her, and she was hiding from everybody.

But now suddenly she did not mind any more! She heard such wonderful news that she could not keep it to herself, she simply had to tell everybody, even the people who did not like her and said bad things about her.

Do you think they believed her? Certainly! Everybody could see that something amazing happened to her, because her face showed it. She was bubbling-happy! In next to no time the whole town came running after this woman to go and see

for themselves what this was all about. This woman who was hiding from everybody, showed lots of people the way to Jesus.

What was now suddenly so different about this woman? What was it that made this big difference in her life?

She met Jesus!

Today there are three questions that we have to ask ourselves:

The first question is: “Have you met Jesus yet?”

To meet Jesus, means to make Him part of your life. In other words, to have a living relationship with Him.

The second question is: “Have you told anybody yet that you met Jesus?”

What did this woman do? She ran back to town and as far as she went, she told everybody what happened to her. Not just her best friend, but EVERYBODY!

The result was that all the people from the town came running up the hill to see for themselves what this was all about. And many people met Jesus that day just because one woman went telling!

The third question is: “Is your life different now from the time before you met Jesus?”

When you meet Jesus, two things happen to you. Firstly God forgives your sins and He gives you eternal life. The second thing that happens to you, is that the Holy Spirit comes to live inside you. Your life gets filled with the Holy Spirit.

The next thing that should now happen to you, is that you will start getting rid of the bad things in your life, the sins, and start a new good life to say thank you to God for what He had done for you. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, everybody will be able to see that you are happy and that you love God.

The problem with most people is that we are full of excuses. I do not have the knowledge to tell people about Jesus. What will my friends think of me? I first have to go and take a course in evangelism. I first have to.....

What did this woman know? All she knew was that Jesus just saved her. She did not know all the details! What did she do? She simply said to everybody: “I met Jesus. He changed my life! Come and see for yourself what this is all about!” Is that so hard?

Today I want to challenge you to go and speak to just one person. Tell him or her: “Jesus made a

difference in my life. He gave me joy! Come to church with me next Sunday so that you can see for yourself what this is all about!”

The Sermon on the Mountain

Matthew 5:13-16

After Jesus called His disciples, He started teaching them and the the other people following Him how God really wants them to live.

On one certain day, Jesus was walking along the shores of the sea of Galilee. Soon there were thousands of people following Him to see Him doing miracles and to listen to the wonderful things He had to say. There were so many people that they could not all see Jesus or hear Him properly. So Jesus decided to

climb halfway up a mountain so that everybody could see Him. He sat down on a big rock, and then He started teaching them about life. Just listen to some of the things that Jesus said to them:

³ "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!"

What does it mean to be spiritually poor? It means that you realise how much you depend on God. If I think that I can do anything on my own, then I am wrong. I must realise that I cannot do anything without God.

⁴ *"Happy are those who mourn."*

Does this mean that somebody who mourns the death of a beloved one is actually happy? No, the meaning of this is that if we mourn about all the things that are wrong, all the crime and hate and people that do not love God, then God will give us comfort.

⁵ *"Happy are those who are humble."*

If I blow my own trumpet, then there is no place for God in my life, because I am the only one. To be humble, is to give all the credit to God.

⁶ *"Happy are those whose*

greatest desire is to do what God requires.”

How do I live? Do I really want to do what God wants me to do? If I do, then God will give me happiness in my heart.

⁷ "Happy are those who are merciful to others.”

God wants us to love Him in the first place, but also love other people. To be merciful is the ultimate of your love. That means that you do not only love people with your mouth, but with your whole life, so that you do things for them and help them when they are in need.

⁸ *"Happy are the pure in heart; they will see God!"*

To be pure in heart means that you keep away from sin. You try your best to do all the right things, and keep away from the wrong things.

⁹ *"Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children!"*

People are fighting over every little thing today. That is not peace! To work for peace means that you must not only stay out of the fight, but you must try to get people who are fighting to make peace.

¹⁰ *"Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!"* ¹¹ *Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers."*

If you do what God wants you to do, the devil will not be happy. He will try anything to stop you from loving God. One way is to get people to insult you or persecute you or tell lies about you. These things hurt! But don't stop doing what God wants you to do. If you do that, you will have happiness in your heart that is much, much

bigger than all those things that unbelievers do against you.

This was the start of Jesus' wonderful sermon on that mountain. After this He taught the people many more things about how God really wants people to live. He started off with two parables, one about salt and the other about light.

Do you have salt in your house? That is a silly question! Of course everybody has salt in her home, because salt is something that you use for a variety of things. Maybe the most important thing is that you use it to give taste to your food. Try cooking meat

without salt! It tastes yeack! You use salt in just about any dish, sometimes even in sweet puddings! But salt is also a very good disinfectant, it kills germs. You can use it to rinse your nose if you suffer from sinus, or gargle if you have a sore throat. And you can use it to preserve some kinds of food, like meat, so that it does not become rotten.

Jesus told the people: “*You are like salt for the whole human race.*” Like real salt, as a Christian you can also give taste to life around you. If you smile and you are friendly, people around you will also feel better. If

you live out love for others, it will make a big difference in your community.

Like salt disinfects, you can also be a disinfectant if you live the way God wants you to live. By for instance making peace, you will kill hate.

And like salt preserves, you can also be a “preservative”. How? If you tell other people about Jesus, you can save them from getting rotten, and give them everlasting life.

In the second parable, Jesus said to them: *“You are like light for the whole world. Your light must*

shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.”

When Escom switches off your power what do you do? You light a candle. And where do you put the candle? Under your bed? How will that help you? It will only scare the Tokolosh that is hiding under your bed!

No, you put your candle high up on something so that it will spread it's light throughout the whole room. In the same way, if you are a Christian, you don't hide what you believe, because then nobody will ever know about it.

You will put what you believe up high so that everybody knows about it. For instance: Do you like coming to Simunye ku Jesu? If you do, why do you keep it to yourself? Shine your light up high and tell other people about Simunye so that they can also become part of this group.

Don't be shy about the fact that you are a believer. Tell people about it, and tell them about the wonderful peace that you have in your heart. Tell them that Jesus is the only One Who can give you that wonderful peace, and also the bubbling joy that you will only find in a Christian's life.

If you shine your light like that, it is not about the “wonderful, good you.” It is all about God! People must see the joy and peace in your life, and know that it can only come from God, and they must praise God for it.

How to Pray

Matthew 6:5-15

We learned that Jesus went halfway up a mountain to teach thousands of people. He delivered that wonderful sermon on the mountain. He told the people many parables – short stories. And He taught them how God really wants them to live.

One of the most important things Jesus taught them, was how to pray. These people were never taught how to really talk to God.

How do we normally pray?

We get our little list about the things that we want, and then we

ask God: “Please, I need this and I need that. I want a new computer because this one is getting old. And I want a new cell phone and enough money so that I can live in a bit of luxury. I need rain badly because my vegetable garden is in a bad state. I am not feeling too good – please, I need good health. And I need a job for my son.”

The things that we ask for are not necessarily bad or wrong things. But the problem is that we only think about ourselves. And that is the wrong part.

What do you talk about if you go and sit with a good friend? Do

you tell her about all the things that you want? No!

When you get together, you will most probably say to her: “Oh I am so glad that we could get together. You are really such a good friend to me, and I want to thank you for helping me the other day when I was in need. It is so nice to have you as a friend.”

If we pray, where do we start? For a start Jesus told these people that to talk to God is not a show! Some of the “holy” people in those days went to prominent places where they knew everybody would see them, and

then they would pray out loud so that everybody could hear how holy they were. Jesus told them that this is not the way to talk to God. He said: “Go into your room and close the door behind you. And when it is quiet, then you can talk to God where nobody but God can hear or see you.”

It is a private conversation between you and God. And what is more: God knows what you need, even if you do not tell Him. It is not necessary to say to God that you need something ten times over. If you come to me and say: “Louis, I really need to get a job.” then I know that you need a

job. Maybe I even knew it before you told me. Two minutes later you say again: “Louis, I want a job!” and five minutes later: “Louis, I want a job!” Half an hour later you say: “Louis, I desperately need a job!” and an hour later: “Louis, I really, really want a job!”

What do you think my reaction will be? I will either shout at you: “Stop! I know!” or I will make sure that I disappear when I see you.

“This, then, is how you should pray:” Jesus told the people, “Our Father in heaven: May your Holy Name be honored;”

Do you remember how I started my conversation with my friend? “Oh I am so glad to see you – you are special to me!” In exactly the same way I tell God how special He is to me. He is holy and I want to praise and worship Him. I want to sing about Him and really just be with Him and cherish every precious moment that I can talk to Him. It is such a wonderful honour to be able to speak to God.

Will you ever get the opportunity to speak to Mr. Zuma? Definitely not! His security guards will stop you long before you can see him. You will never ever get an

appointment to see him. Yet God is so much, much bigger than Mr. Zuma, and you can speak to Him any time you like. Isn't that absolutely wonderful?

The second thing that Jesus told the people is to tell God: “May Your Kingdom come; may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In other words I must tell God how much I would love to see all the people of the whole world become Christians. Wouldn't that be just wonderful! Just think, if your neighbors would all join us on a Saturday for Simunye! We will lift this roof with our singing

and praising God! And if people would all really do God's will, to love one another and love God. There will be no crime, no war, no corruption, no hate!

Only after that we ask God: "Give us today the food we need." No, we do not ask Him for enough food for the rest of the year, but just enough for today. Tomorrow we will care about tomorrow's food. With this we say to God that we are totally dependant on Him alone. We don't say: "God, please give me health, but don't worry about food, I will work for my food myself!" We depend on God for everything. Without Him we will

not be able to live for one second. The next is: “Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.”

We all pray that God forgive us all our sins. But it is so easy to forget the second part, and that is that we also forgive others who did wrong things to us, just like God forgives us. How can I ever expect God to forgive me the many things that I do wrong against Him every day, if I do not want to completely forgive somebody who did one single wrong thing against me?

Jesus stressed this fact: “If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done.”

The last thing Jesus said was: “Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the Evil One.”

What does that mean? There are many things in life that can draw us away from God. Friends invite you to a party where you know there would be a lot of drinking or where bad things would happen. That is also the place where the

devil, the Evil One is a very happy guy. We ask God to show us where the wrong things are happening and to give us the strength to say “No!” when people invite you to such happenings.

To conclude: When we pray, we start by praising God and we say that we want to see God's kingdom go from strength to strength.

Secondly we declare that we depend on God for everything that we need.

Third is that we ask God to forgive us, and we say that we are also willing to forgive others.

The fourth is that we ask God to help us to keep away from all sin.

Two Foundations

Matthew 7:24-29

On the 19th of March 2007 somebody came running to me early that morning. She said: “Come down to the beach immediately. We have a huge problem! A storm hit Ballito the previous night, and there was a lot of damage to the houses on the beach.”

I got into my car and hurried down to the beach, and what I saw filled me with horror. Ballito's beach was devastated! Huge waves came that previous night and washed away all the sand on

the beach. But that was not all, the sewer line for all the flats on the beachfront was washed away as well, and raw sewer was running out onto the beach.

But worst of all, is that many of the houses and flats on the beachfront were badly damaged by the raging sea. As I walked along the beach, I saw some horrifying scenes. One of the blocks of flats built their swimming pool on the dune in front of the flats. When the sea came, it washed all the sand from underneath the pool, and now this huge swimming pool was lying on the rocks, halfway into the sea.

Some of the buildings were built on the sand quite close to the sea. The waves smashed their windows, and in one case the waves went right through the building and even demolished the back wall of the building.

One of the houses was totally washed away. The whole house disappeared into the sea, because it was built on the sand very close to the sea.

The ski boat club was completely washed away. All that remained was a small part of the floor.

A smart restaurant with the name: “Galley On The Rocks” was

actually not built on the rocks. It was built on a sand dune high above the sea. That night the sea came and washed away part of the sand dune, and the next morning half of the restaurant was lying down below on the beach. The restaurant had to close down for a full year until they could fix the damage.

But then I saw something very interesting: The lifesaver's building was built right on the beach. This building still stood firm after the storm. Yes, there were some windows broken, but no damage to the building. Why?

The engineer insisted that the

foundations of this building had to be built on solid rocks. The result was that when the worst storm in Ballito's history came, this building still stood firm.

Jesus was still busy teaching these people on the mountain. Then he told them a parable. A parable is a short story that you use to illustrate some truth. Jesus made use of parables many times to teach the people, because you remember something much better if you can connect it to a story. Do you remember the parable I used a few weeks ago about the candle under the bed to scare the Tokoloshe? Of course you won't

forget it!

The parable that Jesus used in today's lesson is the one about a man who built a house. Like that lifesaver's building on the beach, he also built his house on a rock. And when the heavy rains came and washed away all the soil, his house still stood firm without any major damage.

Jesus also told them about a second man who built his house on the sand. He did not want to go to all the trouble of digging his foundations down to the rock. And when the heavy rains came and washed away all the soil, what happened? His house was

washed away with the sand and the building collapsed, because there was nothing solid underneath.

Now this was a parable. And what did we say, what is a parable? It is a story that tells us a truth about something else.

What do you think Jesus wanted to tell these people with the story about the house?

The house is actually your life. Jesus wanted to show them what the correct way was to build your own life. If the building of your life does not have the right foundations, then your house will

collapse when the storms of life hit your house.

On what foundations do people build the houses of their lives?

1. Money. If I have enough money, then I am happy. Many people just cannot get enough money. Some very rich people are still trying to get more money. When the big storm comes and they lose all their money, then they are lost. Everything that matters in their life is gone.

2. Friends. If your friends mean everything to you, even if they are the wrong type of friends who do not care for God, then you have

the wrong foundations. When these friends leave you, then you are in trouble.

3. Sport. Some people live only for their sport or hobbies. When there is a big soccer match on a Sunday morning, they rather stay home to watch the game than go to church. That is the wrong foundation, and if your team loses, then it feels like the end of the world to you, and your life-house collapses.

4. Religion. This sounds like a good foundation. But if your religion is based on the wrong things, then it could be dangerous. The Pharisees were

very religious people, but they were lost because there was no love in their religion. If your religion is based on rituals, then you are in trouble. When real hardships hit you, then you start doubting God, and then your house tumbles.

There are many wrong foundations to build your life-home on, these that I mentioned are just a few of them. When the rain and storms come, then your house will collapse if you are built on the wrong foundations.

There is only one correct foundation to build your house upon, and that is the Rock Jesus

Christ. If you have a real living relationship with Jesus, then even the worst storms in life will still leave you standing. Yes, the storms will certainly shake your house, and you will feel scared. But your house will not collapse as long as you are built on Jesus and anchored onto the Rock of Ages.

The Storm and the Demons

Matthew 8:23-34

Jesus spent a long time on the mountain teaching the people. Last time we heard the story of the two houses, one built on sand and the other built on rock. Then there was a huge storm, and the house built on sand was washed away, but the rock-house stood fast.

After all this, Jesus was very tired, and he went down to the beach with His twelve disciples. They got into Peter's boat, and then they started rowing to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to a

place called Gadara. Jesus was so exhausted from the whole day's teaching, that He went to lie down on a bench, and He fell asleep.

When the guys were in the middle of the sea, the wind started blowing. It grew stronger and stronger, until it became a proper storm. The waves crashed over the side of the boat and the disciples were scared. And meanwhile, Jesus was sleeping like a baby! The guys grabbed the oars and they rowed all they could to get them to land and safety, but it was all in vain, and they could see that they would all

drown in that terrible storm.

At last they woke Jesus: "Lord, please save us! We are all about to die!"

"Why are you so frightened?" Jesus asked them. "Why is your faith so little?" Then He got up and ordered the winds and the waves to stop, and immediately the storm died down. The wind stopped blowing and the waves became calm.

The twelve men were astonished. They could not believe what they had just experienced. Then they realised that Jesus is not just an ordinary man, He is much more

than that! Even the sea and the wind obey Him!

They continued their journey to the other side of the sea to Gadara. As soon as they landed their boat on the shore, they saw two men come running towards them. The scary part is, that these men came out of a graveyard. When they got closer, the guys could see that there was something terribly wrong with these two men. They had a wild look in their eyes, and they could clearly see that they were not here for a friendly chat. They were here to beat them up!

Something that they did not know,

is that everybody was scared of these two, because they were violent and they would beat up anybody coming close to them. As a matter of fact, these men were possessed by demons, and they actually lived in that graveyard amongst the graves and terrorised everybody who came their way. They had no friends because nobody had the courage to even talk to them.

When these two horrible men came charging down towards Jesus and His disciples, the guys wanted to get back into the boat and rush back to Galilee. But Jesus just stood there smiling,

and He waited for the two to come to Him. Suddenly they stopped, and then they started screaming: "What do you want with us, you Son of God? Have you come to punish us before the right time?"

Do you think that these two men actually thought that Jesus was here to punish them? And how do you think these two knew exactly who Jesus was? How did they find out that Jesus was the Son of God?

The fact is that these two men knew nothing about Jesus. It was not even them speaking! There is a world that we cannot see – the

world of angels and demons. The angels are servants of God, but the demons are servants of the devil. They are actually also angels, but they were cast out of heaven when Satan started a revolution against God.

It was some of these demons that possessed these two men. They went to live in their bodies and they took over their lives. They totally dominated them, so that the men simply had to do exactly what the demons told them to do. The demons even used their voices to speak to Jesus. So when the men asked Jesus: "What do you want with us, you

Son of God?” it was actually not them speaking, but the demons in them. The demons knew Jesus very well. They knew exactly who He was! But they did not worship Him, they worshipped their own master, Satan.

Jesus told these demons to leave the men. They obeyed Jesus and went into a herd of pigs. The pigs started running, and they fell over a cliff and drowned.

Very soon all the people of the town heard what happened. They all came to see this Man with enough power to drive out demons. But they were scared of Jesus, so they asked Him please

to leave their town. So Jesus and the twelve guys got back into their boat and rowed back to Galilee.

This is a scary story! But there is much to learn from it. In the first part of this story we saw how Jesus simply commanded the storm to be quiet, and it happened. If we read John 1, we actually see that Jesus is the One who created everything. If He created the wind and the sea, then He has enough power to also control them. And that is exactly what Jesus wanted to demonstrate. We all know that nothing and nobody can control a storm. Last time we saw what a

storm could do. But Jesus is powerful enough to command the fiercest storm to subside.

In our second story we see something very similar. Everybody was scared of these two men, and nobody could do anything to free them from their terrible bondage. But with a single word, Jesus gave them total freedom. He simply said to the demons: “Go! Hamba!” And all they could do was to obey Him.

Are there still demons today? And if there are, do they still possess people? The answer is “Yes!” I have experienced myself how demons can possess people. I

once saw it during a Hindu festival, where Hindus became totally possessed. I also saw it last year in Mozambique, where people were possessed. But the bondage was broken the moment that Jesus came into their lives!

But what about you and me? Some Christians are scared of demons!

The fact is, that once the Holy Spirit is within you, then there is no room for a demon. As Christians we must always make sure that we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and that we have a real living relationship with Jesus. Then we do not have any reason

to fear demons possessing our lives. Jesus is mighty enough to calm a storm, and He is mighty enough to send any demon on his way!

The Landowner and the Bad Farmers

Matthew 21:33-41

One day Jesus told the people a very strange story. He said that once there was a landowner who started to develop his land. He went and bought vines and then he went to great trouble to plant a vineyard. He knew that one day this would bear fruit, and he could get lots of sweet, juicy grapes from the vineyard.

But he did not stop there, he got stonemasons to build him a beautiful wall around this vineyard to stop the foxes from getting in

and doing damage. But still it was not enough, he also built a watch tower so that somebody could sit in it and guard the vineyard. And he built a wine press so that the grapes that are harvested could be turned into wine.

Then he was satisfied. Everything was perfect.

But this landowner decided that he did not want to keep it to himself. He advertised that this prime farm could be rented. And a farmer came along. All this landowner wanted for his vineyard, was part of the harvest every year. The farmer was happy, and he agreed. And so the

landowner went away and left the farmer to carry on.

Month after month the farmer watched as the grapes started growing and getting bigger and bigger. And then the time came for the harvest. The farmer was very happy, because this landowner used only the best material to get a huge harvest of big bunches of sweet, juicy grapes. In his mind's eye he could see the money rolling in as he sold his excellent wine.

But this was also the time for the landowner to come and collect his rent that was due to him as they had agreed. He sent three slaves

to the farmer to collect the rent. But the farmer was greedy. He did not want to share his large profit with the landowner. So he told his own slaves to beat up the landowner's slaves. They even killed one of them, and they threw stones at one of them.

When the landowner heard about this terrible thing that happened to his slaves, he thought that this must have been a terrible mistake, so he sent three more slaves to the farmer. And once again the farmer did to them what he did to the previous slaves.

The poor landowner was shattered. How could this farmer

do such a terrible thing! So he decided to send his own son to go and talk to the farmer. His son was his own representative, and the farmer certainly would not harm him.

But when his son got there, the farmer thought that if he killed the son, then he could get the vineyard for himself. So he instructed his slaves to drag this young man outside the vineyard and kill him.

Then Jesus asked the question: “If that landowner would return to his vineyard, what do you think he would do to this horrible farmer?”

What do yóu think? If you were that landowner, what would you do? This man killed your employees and your own child in cold blood! Surely he deserves the worst punishment possible.

Jesus went on to tell them that théy were actually this farmer. They were the ones who rejected the Landowner and His Son, and that this “vineyard” that the Landowner gave them would one day be taken away from them, and it would be given to people who really appreciated it.

The people listening to Jesus were not happy about what He said, especially not the Pharisees

and the head of the Priests. They knew that Jesus' words were actually directed towards them. And they planned to get rid of Jesus!

Maybe you will say: "The people were terrible in those days!" But this story is also meant for you and me today. This is the story of God's great love for all people. Over the years He gave people love and mercy in abundance. But they were greedy and only wanted God's gifts without keeping their part of the bargain. God wants all people to believe in Him, to love Him and to serve Him. But they do not do it. So

God sent His prophets, His messengers to the people. They beat them up and killed them.

Then God sent His own Son, Jesus, and they killed Him in the most horrible way!

If we look back into the history of the past 2000 years, we will see how many of God's servants were scorned, chased away, mistreated and even killed. And it is still happening today!

The first question we must ask ourselves today, is if we are not perhaps one of those people who scorn God's messengers or chase them away. I truly believe

that none of us are like that.

If we are not, then we are God's servants. That is good news, isn't it? But what are these servants of God supposed to do? They are supposed to be God's messengers. And it is still not easy to be God's messenger, because people still laugh at you if you want to tell them about Jesus. People still tell you that you are stupid because you believe. People still use the holy Name of God as a swear word, and if you ask them not to do it, they mock you. Last week I heard a well-known TV personality say that it is a myth that God created

everything. He implied that there is no God. And I wanted to say to him: “How can you be so stupid?”

In some of the Muslim countries it is even much worse. People are killed or martyred or thrown into prison if they try to be God's messenger, to tell someone about Jesus. It is against the law in those countries.

How many of us are brave enough to be God's messengers? It is not easy, and you might also be mocked or people might swear at you.

But remember one thing: It is not you as a person that they are

mocking or swearing, it is God Himself. The farmer in that vineyard did not have anything against the landowner's slaves. By killing his slaves, they tried to harm the landowner himself.

And it is not for you and me to try and do something against them. Let it be! If somebody rejects God, He will one day reject them! And I do not want to be in their shoes when that happens!

God begs everyone to accept His wonderful gift of everlasting life. All they have to do is to accept it by believing in His Son, Jesus. It is everybody's own choice if they want heaven or the everlasting

punishment in hell.

Peter's Testimony

Luke 9:18-20

It is hard work being a preacher. You must listen to many people with all their problems. And it takes many, many hours to make a sermon. You must know what you are talking about. Before you can preach about something, you must read difficult books. And when you preach, you must perform, so that people listen to you. It is hard work!

But **you cannot preach if you do not pray**, that is something that is most essential. As a matter of fact, you cannot do anything if

you do not pray. All the hard work in preparing for a sermon is worthless if I do not pray and talk to God about this, and ask Him for wisdom and strength.

But there is something else that is essential if you want to preach: you **must believe in God**. If you do not believe, then you do not have anything to preach about.

But I can assure you, no preacher today works as hard as Jesus did when He was a preacher. He did not only preach, he healed many, many sick people, and He performed all sorts of wonderful miracles. This is hard work. He worked long hours, and there

were always thousands of people around Him, and they all demanded His attention. I can only imagine how tired He must have been every evening.

And then He couldn't just fall into a nice soft bed, because most of the time, He and His followers simply slept on the hard ground somewhere out in the open.

How did Jesus manage all this?

The answer is simple: He found His strength to carry on in prayer. He prayed! In our story today, that is what we find Him doing. It must have been late one afternoon after the big crowd had gone

home. Jesus was left alone with the twelve men. And then Jesus went one side to be alone, all on His own. He wanted to pray alone. That was the one big secret that kept Him going, so that He could carry on with His hard work.

We can learn from Jesus. When you see me on a Saturday morning, all you see is this happy-go-lucky clown that talks a lot and performs and smiles. But I also have a very big secret. Certainly I do have lots of problems. One of them is that my wife has been in hospital for almost a month now. She is

paralised. But I cannot let that stand in my way. To give you this sermon on a Saturday, takes a lot of time hard work to prepare. Yesterday morning I started preparing for this sermon at half past 4 in the morning. By the time I get here on a Saturday, I am tired.

But my secret is, that I talk to God, and He gives me the wisdom and strength to do all these things. I am not the bright spark. It is God that makes me a bright spark. Without Him, I will be nothing, just a dull old man that tries to preach, without much success.

But our story is not about me - it is about a guy called Peter. While Jesus was busy praying, he and his mates were sitting, watching Jesus and wondering what this praying was all about. When Jesus was finished praying, He called them. And then He asked them a very funny question. **“You guys mingle with all the people that come to see Me. You hear what they say about Me all the time. I want to know: what do these people say about Me? What do they believe about Me? Who am I?”**

The guys laughed about this silly question. “Some say that You are

John the Baptist. Others say that You are the prophet Elijah! Some even think that You are some other big prophet from the past.”

But this was not such a silly question, because Jesus actually wanted to know what the twelve guys believed. Did they really, really understand Who He was? So He asked them: **“But you - what do YOU believe? Who do YOU think I am?”**

Then Peter stood up: **“You are God's Messiah!”**

In Matthew 16, we see that Jesus then told Peter: **“Good for you, Peter. You did not say this**

because you are so clever, but because God told you so. Peter, you are a ROCK! I tell you today, Peter, that the whole church will be built on this rock, and nothing will be able to destroy it.”

Our question today is: **what do WE believe?** What do you believe about God? And about Jesus? If someone asks you that question today - how will you answer? Can I tell you what I believe?

* I get very excited when I talk about the things that I believe. In the first place I believe with all my heart and soul and my mind that

there is a True, Living, Loving, Almighty God - the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

* He is the One Who created the heaven and the earth. He created all the millions and millions of stars from nothing. He created the flowers and the animals and the beautiful butterflies and He created you and me! All this, He did with His own hands. Personally!

* And what about Jesus? I believe that Jesus is God. He is the Christ, Son of the Almighty God. And do you know what? Today I can jump with joy and excitement, because He is also my Lord!

Maybe I cannot understand all these things, but I know that everything is true. Jesus was born as a normal baby, but His mother, Mary was a virgin. I believe it, because the Bible, the Word of God tells me so.

* I also believe that Jesus, the Son of God, suffered and paid for my sins. People rejected Him. They mocked Him. They tortured Him and eventually they hammered nails through His hands and feet, and He died on the cross to pay for my sins. And then He was buried in a grave.

* But today I am dancing with joy, because He did not stay in the

grave: He rose up from death, and came out of the grave.

* He is alive! He went to heaven, and He is sitting on God's throne to rule as the King of all kings.

* I also believe that one day Jesus is coming again to judge all people.

* But I am not scared about this judgment, because I know that He has already forgiven all my sins. He has given me the eternal life, and one day I will live with Him in heaven.

* I also want to tell you that I believe in the Holy Spirit. He is right inside me and He gives me

all the strength and wisdom that I need.

Can you say the same today? Do you believe this? Do you also have Jesus deep inside your heart?

The Triumphal Entry

Luke 19:28-40

One day Jesus told His disciples that they all had to go to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. The guys said to Jesus: “Rabbi, if we go there, the Pharisees will surely arrest You and kill You!”

Jesus answered them: “Listen! We are going to Jerusalem! Everything the prophets wrote about Me will come true in Jerusalem. I will be handed over to the Romans. They will humiliate Me, they will whip Me, and then they will kill Me. But

three days later I will rise from the dead again!” (You can read all about this conversation in Luke 18:31-34)

So they went on their long journey to Jerusalem. Early the next Sunday morning, they arrived at a little village called Bethany, very close to Jerusalem. From there they could see before them the beautiful city of Jerusalem. Jesus stood there, looking at the path winding down the Mount of Olives towards the huge gate in the city wall. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and He gave them a strange request: “Go down to the village. You will

find a donkey tied to a post. I want you to bring that donkey to Me. And if anybody asks you why you are taking the donkey, then just tell them: ‘The Lord needs this donkey’”.

The guys just shook their heads – they did not understand. And sure enough, when they got to the village, the donkey was there, just like Jesus said. So they took the donkey to Jesus.

But in the meantime, somebody noticed Jesus standing on the hill, waiting for the guys to come back. He told all his friends that he saw Jesus, and they told their friends, and within minutes there

were thousands of people gathered around Jesus.

When the disciples arrived with the donkey, they put some clothes on it's back, and they helped Jesus to climb onto the animal. Then He started riding down the winding path towards the city, down the Mount of Olives.

Then somebody started singing: "God bless the King who comes in the Name of the Lord!"

These people saw all the wonderful things that Jesus did, and they were certain that Jesus was actually the Messiah. They wanted to crown Him as the King

of the Jews, and they hoped that this mighty King would free them from the Romans. So more people started joining in with the song: “God bless the King who comes in the Name of the Lord!” And soon everybody was singing: “Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosannah! Hosannah! Hosannah, Hosannah!”

They were very happy, because they thought that Jesus was coming to free the city of Jerusalem. They were dancing and shouting: “Praise God!” Many of the people took branches off the palm trees and they were

waving them to show their happiness. Some of the people even took some of their clothes and laid it on the road before Jesus so that He could ride into the city on their clothes.

And all the time they were singing: “Hosannah! Hosannah! Hosannah, Hosannah! Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord!”

But not everybody was all that happy. When they came closer to the city, there was a bunch of grumpy old men standing in the middle of the road. They were not singing with the rest. They were angry! They did not like what they

saw. “Stop that noise!” they shouted, but the large crowd simply carried on singing: “Hosannah! Hosannah! Hosannah, Hosannah!” Then the men walked up to Jesus, and they commanded Him: “Tell Your followers to stop making that noise!”

But Jesus answered them: “I am telling you today: if they keep quiet, then the rocks and stones will shout it out!”

And the grumpy old Pharisees were grinding their teeth as the crowd kept on singing: “Hosannah! Hosannah! Hosannah, Hosannah!”

When they came very close to Jerusalem, Jesus suddenly burst out in tears. He was crying sorrowfully, as He was looking at the beautiful walls of the mighty city: “Oh Jerusalem”, He sobbed, “If only you knew what was going to happen to you.” The people did not know what was wrong with Jesus, and slowly they stopped their singing.

Then Jesus sadly shook His head: “The time will come when your enemies will surround you, Jerusalem.” He said, “They will completely destroy you and the people within your walls; not a single stone will they leave in it’s

place, because you did not recognize the time when God came to save you!”

Nobody understood what Jesus was talking about. But this was actually a prophecy. Forty years later, the Romans made war against Israel. They stormed into Jerusalem, and they destroyed the beautiful city. They even demolished the majestic temple and burnt it down. There was lots of gold on the walls of the temple, and when the gold melted, it flowed in between the stones. Then the soldiers broke the walls right down to the foundations to get to the gold. Not a single stone

was left in the walls of the temple, exactly like Jesus said it would happen.

Why did this terrible thing happen? Because the Jews rejected Jesus! They did not want to believe in Him. The very same people that were singing: “Hosannah! Hosannah!” shouted out in anger, just a few days later: “Crucify Him! Kill Him! We don’t want this Jesus in our lives!”

This morning we are also singing joyfully: “Hosannah, Hosannah, Hosannah in the highest!” But do we really mean every word we are singing? Or are we in a certain way just like those

people? They did not really have a relationship with Jesus. To them, Jesus was the Great Messiah that would do things for them. He would free them from the Romans. He would rule as King and give them a comfortable life. And when they saw that Jesus was not going to do what they demanded, then they killed Him.

Quite often people say that they are Christians, and they even go to church. But they only do that to try and manipulate God to do things for them. “God, I read the Bible, pray and go to church! I have done my part, now it is Your

turn to give me health, money, a job, a nice home.” And when God does not do that, then they become angry with God and they stop doing the “nice” things.

Somebody that has a relationship with God, goes to church and does good things simply because they love God, without expecting something back from God. If I have a relationship with Jesus and things start going bad, then I carry on serving Him and doing the things that He wants me to do. And I carry on singing: “Hosannah! Hosannah!” because I love Jesus unconditionally deep down in my heart. And I know that

He also loves me unconditionally,
even much, much more than I
can ever love Him.

The Upper Room

Mathew 26:17-30

Jesus and His 12 disciples went from Galilee to Jerusalem, for one of the big Jewish festivals: Passover. When they came to Jerusalem, the disciples brought Jesus a donkey, and He rode into the city on this donkey. There were many people who came after Him. They waved palm branches and they sang: "Hosanna, hosanna!" They thought Jesus was coming to save them from the Romans.

A few days later it was time for Passover. During the Passover

festival, the family normally got together, and they would eat the meat of a lamb, some bitter herbs and bread that was made without using yeast. They would drink some wine.

The passover meal reminded them of the day when God saved the Israelites from Egypt. On the day before they left Egypt, they had to kill a lamb and paint the blood of this lamb on their door frames so that the angel of death would go past them and they could be saved.

Jesus and the 12 guys were a “family”, and they wanted to have this meal in honour of God and

give God thanks because He saved their ancestors. But they needed a place where they could get together. They did not have any friends or relatives in Jerusalem where they could get a room for this purpose.

So Jesus sent some of the guys into the city, and He told them to go to a certain house where they would find a man. They had to ask him to use his house to have the meal. And if he asked them what it was all about, they simply had to tell him that their “Teacher” said that He needed it.

So they went into Jerusalem, and they found it exactly like Jesus

told them. They prepared the room and the food for the evening Passover meal.

When evening came, they all went into the room and they sat down around the big table. In those times people did not exactly sit around a table, lay on cushions. While they were busy eating, Jesus said to them: “One of you is going to betray Me.”

They looked at each other in shock. Who would do such a horrible thing? “Surely it is not me, Lord?” the guys all asked. How could their Master say such a bad thing about them?

There was a dish with meat and some gravy. The guys took their bread and dipped it in the dish with gravy. Jesus then said to them: “One of you guys dipping your bread in this dish with Me will betray Me and I am going to die.”

One of the twelve was guilty – his name was Judas. That same morning he went to the Jewish leaders and he told them that he was willing to betray Jesus. They paid him in silver coins for this terrible deed.

Now Judas looked at Jesus, looking totally innocent: “Surely you don't mean that it is me,

Lord?”

“You said it!” Jesus told him.

After that, Jesus took a piece of bread. Then, while He was holding it in His hands, he prayed and said thankyou to God. He then broke it, and gave it to his disciples. “Take it and eat it,” he said to them, “this is My body.”

What do you think Jesus meant by this? Just like that piece of bread was broken, so His body would also be broken. In other words, He would be killed. The very next day His body was broken. Hy was killed – He died and His body was broken for me

and you. Today, if we eat bread when we have holy communion, it reminds us of Jesus, and how His body was broken for me and you on Good Friday.

Next Jesus took the jug of wine and he told the men: “This is My blood, drink it. My blood will be poured out so that your sins could be forgiven.”

Today it still reminds us that Jesus paid for all our sins with His precious blood. Every time we have holy communion, we see the wine, we smell it and we taste it. And we know everything is for real. If we believe in Jesus, He has already forgiven all our sins.

And with this He gives us eternal life. Through His blood we become God's children.

Shortly after that, Judas walked out. He went to the Jewish leaders to tell them where Jesus would spend the night, so that they could arrest Him. Judas had to go with them to show them the spot where he knew Jesus would be. It was dark in the garden where Jesus and the other guys would spend the night, and Judas had to take the soldiers right up to Him.

When they finished their meal, they went out to a garden on the Mount of Olives to find a place to

sleep. On their way Jesus told them that they would all deny Him, that means that they would not stand by Him when He needed them. They would run away and tell people that they did not know Jesus. Peter was not happy about this. He told Jesus: “Maybe the others would deny You, but me? No, never! I will stand by You even if they kill me!”

Jesus said to Peter: “Peter, tonight you will deny me three times before the cock crows.”

Peter did not like this accusation at all. But later that same night it happened exactly like Jesus told him. When a young girl asked him

if he was one of Jesus' friends, Peter denied it – he said that he did not even know this Jesus at all.

When they got to their sleeping place, the men settled down for the night. But Jesus walked a little further, because He wanted to be alone to pray. For a long time Jesus spent time in prayer. He pleaded with God and asked Him to please not let the terrible things of the next day happen to Him. But then He said to God: “Let Your will be done, Father.”

Shortly after that Judas came with the soldiers to arrest Jesus to take Him for His trial.

Jesus Crucified

Matthew 27:32-44

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. Everybody was singing “Hosannah! Hosannah!” and they were joyfully waving palmbranches to welcome Jesus into the city.

Only 4 days later, on that Thursday night, Judas betrayed Jesus, and He was arrested. In the middle of the night, they took Him to the house of the High Priest where they charged Him in a court. The only one of His friends that had the courage to go and see what they were doing to

Jesus, was Peter. But when someone asked Peter if he knew Jesus, he said: “No, I don't know that Man, I have never seen Him before.”

The court hearing went on, hour after hour. They hit Jesus in the face and mocked Him, but He did not try to fight back. Eventually the High Priest said that Jesus was guilty, because He said that He was the Son of God. The High Priest said that what Jesus said was blasphemy, and for that He had to be executed. But the Jews had no power to condemn a man to death - only the Roman

authorities could give the death penalty.

It was still very early when they took Jesus to the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate. After a long hearing, he found that Jesus was totally innocent. He was not guilty of any punishable law. But the Jews demanded that Jesus had to be executed, they wanted to see Him hanging on a cross. And the same people who sang “Hosannah!” were now screaming: “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Eventually Pilate gave in. He washed his hands to show them that he did not want anything to do with this execution,

and that the blood of Jesus was on their hands.

Then he sent Jesus down to the soldiers. They tied Him to a pole, and with a whip with bits of steel on the end, they hit Him. They beat Him with the whip until the blood was streaming from His body. Then they mocked Him and forced a crown of thorns on His head, so that the thorns pierced deep into His skin, and the blood streamed over His face.

Peter did not see all these things happening to his Master, because he ran away - he felt too ashamed of what he did. Maybe he was scared.

Jesus had to carry His own heavy wooden cross all the way up the hill to a place called Golgotha - the place of the skull. Many people followed Jesus and mocked Him. But after a while Jesus just could not go on any more. He was so weak from all the beating and loss of blood, that He just could not carry the cross any longer - it was a heavy wooden structure. Then the soldiers grabbed one of the men standing near Jesus, and forced him to carry the cross for Jesus. His name was Simon - a man from Sirene, a large town in Libia in North Africa. He took the cross

and carried it, while the soldiers and the Jews were still mocking Jesus and chasing Him up the steep hill.

When they got to the top, they took all Jesus' clothes and then they made Him lie down on the wooden cross. Then one of the soldiers took a hammer and large iron nails, and he started hammering nails through the hands of the Son of God. Jesus must have been screaming with pain. When he was finished with the hands, he hammered a nail through Jesus' feet.

Then they hoisted Him up, so that He was hanging there, naked,

with the nails tearing through His flesh. And everybody was laughing and shouting swear-words at Him and mocking Him.

By this time, the whole town was there, because everybody heard about this thing happening on the hill. The women that followed Jesus were also there, they stood together on one side, crying and very sad to see the Man that they loved so much, hanging there in the greatest pain you could imagine. In the crowd, there was also a small group of men, but they were not mocking Jesus - they just stood there. They were shattered, because their Master

and Friend was being treated like a criminal. Yes, Peter was also there. He was crying, because when His Friend needed him most, he ran away.

There were also two other men that were crucified with Jesus. They were criminals, murderers. While they were hanging in pain, one of them also mocked Jesus - saying terrible things about Him. Then the other criminal said to him that this was wrong - Jesus was innocent. He told him to stop doing this. Then Jesus said to this man that he would be in Paradise (heaven) with Him that same night.

Jesus was hanging there in the scorching sun for a long time. That afternoon the sun suddenly disappeared, and it went pitch dark for a while. And after that there was a terrible earthquake that shook the city of Jerusalem. People were scared when they saw these things. God also tore the heavy curtain in the temple.

Then Jesus died. Peter and the other disciples cried bitterly, because their Master and Friend was gone forever.

A kind man, Joseph from Aramathea buried Jesus in a stone grave that he bought for

himself. They rolled a heavy stone in front of the opening.

And then night came, and it was the Sabbath.

The Empty Grave

John 20:1-18

Once a year we celebrate a very important day: Good Friday. That is the day when we commemorate the day that Jesus was crucified.

In a terrible way Jesus was beaten, mocked and nailed to a wooden cross to die, with a crown of thorns on His head.

Late that afternoon, after Jesus had died, a rich man by the name of Joseph from Arimathea came and helped the women to take Jesus' body from the cross. They then buried Jesus in Joseph's

own grave.

The Jewish leaders were scared that the disciples would steal Jesus' body, so they organised with the Romans to have soldiers seal the grave and to guard it day and night.

That Saturday night something happened at the grave. The tough Roman soldiers were still standing on guard duty, when they saw two strange men in bright shining clothes standing by the grave. The soldiers got a big fright. These two men were angels of God. They rolled away the heavy stone in front of the grave. The soldiers were so

scared that they ran away.

In the meantime Mary Magdalene and two other women wanted to go to the grave. It was still dark that Sunday morning when they started walking. When they got there, they got a big fright, because they saw that the grave was open.

Mary Magdalene turned around and she ran back to Peter and John to tell them that the grave was opened and somebody stole Jesus' body.

Meanwhile, the other two women looked inside the grave to see what had happened. And then

they saw the two angels in bright shining clothes. The angels told the women that Jesus was not there – that He had risen from the dead. They went back home to tell the others what they saw.

While they were on their way back home, Peter and John came running as fast as they could. And Mary Magdalene followed them back to the grave.

When the two men got to the grave, John stood outside, trying to see what was going on inside the dark grave. Peter pushed past him and he went inside. There he saw the cloth that was wrapped around Jesus' head, neatly folded

and put one side. The rest of the cloths that were around the body of Jesus were lying in a big heap.

The two men then walked back home. They could not understand what had happened.

Mary Magdalene got back to the grave after the men left. She was very sad, because she thought that somebody stole the body. She was crying. She peered inside the grave, and then she saw the same two angels that appeared to the other women.

The angels asked her why she was crying. She told them that somebody took the body of her

Lord, and she did not know where they buried Him.

Then she turned around and started walking away.

But somebody was standing in her way, and the person asked her: “Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?”

Mary was crying so hard that she did not even see who was standing in front of her: “Please tell me where you buried His body,” she sobbed, “I will go and fetch Him there myself.”

Then the person called her by her name: “Mary!”

She looked up, and only then did

she recognise Jesus standing in front of her. She was so overjoyed – she grabbed him around His legs and kissed His feet.

Then Jesus told her to get up and to go and tell the others that He was alive.

In the meantime the news spread that the grave was open and empty. Many of the followers of Jesus got together to discuss these things that had happened. They were worried, because they did not know what had happened. All they knew was that Jesus' body was gone. Did somebody steal it? Who would do such a

horrible thing?

The two women who saw the angels told everybody what the angels said. But they did not quite believe them. Maybe they were dreaming!

Then Mary Magdalene came running in: “I saw Him! I saw him!” she shouted.

“Who did you see, Mary?”

“I saw Jesus! He was talking to me and He told me to come and tell you all that He is alive!”

“Are you sure, Mary?”

“Of course I am sure! I saw Him with my own two eyes and I

kissed His feet and held His legs. And He talked to me. Of course I am sure!”

Later that day two men came running into the house: “We saw Jesus!” they shouted. We were walking to the small town Emmaus, when Jesus came to us. He walked with us and He had lunch with us. Oh we were so happy to see that He is alive.”

The news spread like a wild fire. That Sunday evening a lot of people were together in a house, listening to the stories of the people who saw Jesus. They locked the door, because they were scared of the Jews.

And suddenly Jesus was standing right amongst them. He came through the locked door. Everybody was very happy to see Him. Now they knew for sure that it was not just a story, but that Jesus was really alive.

Indeed, today we can be sure that Jesus is not just a character out of some story. He died on the cross and He was buried. But He rose from the dead, and today He is still alive. Many people saw Him after His resurrection.

He promised His disciples that He would rise from the dead, and He kept His promise. He made many more promises that apply to you

and me today. Do you think He will keep those promises as well?

Of course He will keep His promises. He is not like our politicians that make empty promises. His promises for you and me will stand for ever.

Gone Fishing

John 21:1-6

We heard the story of Easter. Jesus was crucified. He died and was buried. But that Sunday Morning He rose from the dead. Jesus was alive! He met two women near the grave and told them to go and tell the disciples that they saw Him and that He wanted them to go to Galilee, where He was going to meet them.

They did as they were told and went to Galilee, where they waited on Jesus. But these guys did not know what to do with

themselves while they were waiting. Then one day Peter said to the other guys: “I’m bored! I’m going fishing! Is anyone coming with me?”

“OK, I will come,” said Thomas. “Me too,” said some of the others. And so late that afternoon seven guys walked down to the lake to go fishing.

When they got to the beach, they loaded their oars and a big pile of nets into Peter’s boat. Then they pushed the heavy boat into the water and all jumped in, and started rowing.

Peter knew exactly where to get

the fish, so he took the guys to the best spot where they would certainly get lots of fish. They started throwing out their nets, then rowed in a big circle while one of them cast the long net over the left side of the boat, like they always did.

Then, when all the nets were in the water, they pulled it from both ends. When they had all the nets in the boat, they started looking for fish in the nets. But they did not find a single little fish. Nothing!

Of course they were very disappointed, because they thought they were going to get

lots of fish.

But they were not going to give up that easily, so they started all over again, throwing the nets over the left side of the boat, as they had been doing for many years. They once again rowed their boat in a big circle to go right around the fish. Then they started pulling in the nets again. Pull, pull, pull. They strained to get the heavy nets into the boat.

But when they looked for fish in the nets, still there was nothing. Not even a sardine!

So they rowed to another spot and threw their nets, pulled them

in and once again they were empty.

“I simply cannot understand this”, said Peter. “There is not a single fish in the whole sea! How is this possible?”

By that time it was becoming very late. They had been fishing all night long and working very hard. And they still had not caught a single little fish. “I give up!” said Peter, “Let’s go home!”

They started rowing to go back home. But when they got near the shore, they saw somebody standing on the beach. He shouted at them: “Have you

caught any fish?”

“No! Nothing!” they answered.

And then the Person on the beach said to them: “Just throw your nets on the right side of the boat.” It was still quite dark, and they could not see who the person was, standing on the beach.

Peter thought: “What is the difference? If there are no fish on the left side of the boat, then there will not be any fish on the right side!” But he decided to take this chance, and they started throwing their nets over the other side of the boat. Once again the

tired men rowed their boat in a big circle, and then pulled in the nets.

But this time they noticed that something was very different - the nets were heavy, very heavy. "What is happening?" one of the guys moaned. They pulled and pulled, but the nets were so heavy that they could not get it out of the water. Then they saw all the fish struggling in their nets, not little sardines, but large ones. And many of them!

Then John said: "Peter, that Man on the beach is Jesus!" Peter quickly put on his shirt and jumped over the side of the boat.

He swam to the shore, where he found Jesus sitting by a small fire.

The other guys struggled with the nets. It was so heavy that they could not even get it into their boat. When they finally got to the shore, they hauled the nets out onto the beach. They found 153 large fishes in their nets.

Jesus fried some fish for them over a fire on the beach and He invited them to eat with Him.

After a while Jesus asked Peter if he really loved Him? Peter said: "Yes, of course I love You!" And then Jesus told Peter that he must look after His sheep. After a

while Jesus asked Peter the same question. And once again Peter told Jesus that he really loved Him. Again Jesus said that Peter must look after His sheep. Peter knew that Jesus did not mean real sheep, but the people who believe in Jesus.

This happened a third time. Then Peter started crying. “You know everything Lord! You know that I love You very much!” Peter told Jesus. Maybe Peter remembered that horrible day when he told the people at Jesus’ trial that he did not know who this Jesus was.

In spite of the terrible thing Peter did, Jesus still wanted him to work

for him and care for His “sheep”. Jesus still trusted Peter in spite of his weaknesses.

What do we learn from this story?

First of all, we see that Jesus is almighty. Nothing is impossible for Him. We normally make things impossible for ourselves, by thinking that we cannot do something.

But more important, we learn that Jesus loves us and He wants to use us in His Kingdom. Even if we are not perfect and sometimes do stupid things, like Peter did, He still wants to use us. Each one of us is important to Him.

It is also very important that we tell Jesus that we love Him. He wants us to say it in words, but He also wants us to show Him that we love Him by doing things for Him. Things like caring for His “sheep”, in other words to live out our love towards other people.

The question Jesus is asking you today is: “Do you really love Me? If you do, then show Me how much you really love Me!”

Go and tell the nations!

Matthew 28:16-20

Acts 1:1-9

After Jesus was crucified, the disciples did not know what to do. They thought that Jesus was dead, and when they saw the empty grave, they were very confused. Mary Magdalene told them that she saw Jesus, but they did not know if they could believe her. Maybe it was just in her mind! Jesus also told her to tell all the disciples to go to Galilee, where He would meet them.

Last week we heard the story

about how Jesus met them on the beach while they were trying to do some fishing. After a whole night of fishing, where they did not get a single fish, they decided to go home.

They started rowing to go back home. But when they got near the shore, they saw somebody standing on the beach. He shouted at them: “Have you caught any fish?”

“No! Nothing!” they answered.

And then the Person on the beach said to them: “Just throw your nets on the right side of the boat.” When they pulled in the

nets, it was full of fish. Then they realised that it was actually Jesus. He invited them to have breakfast with Him on the beach. Jesus then asked Peter if he really loved Him, and Jesus gave Peter the command to look after His sheep.

Jesus gave the disciples the order to meet Him on a certain mountain in Galilee on a specific day. When they got there, they found Jesus already waiting for them on the mountain.

Firstly Jesus said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth." What exactly does that mean? It means that He is

the highest authority, even higher than the mightiest president or king. He is even mightier than Satan! Satan is powerless against Him.

Then Jesus told them that He wanted them to go back to Jerusalem and stay there, because something awesome was going to happen there. They were going to receive the Holy Spirit. And He was going to give them great power. The same power that is in Jesus, would be given to the disciples.

But we must remember that those disciples were not super humans. They were exactly like

you and me. Today we may have exactly the same power as them. Why? We also have the Holy Spirit to guide us, fill us and give us wisdom and power. But it is not for our personal use, it is to be used for the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore Jesus told them to go to all people all over the world and make them His disciples. And that is exactly why He was going to give them all that power, to work for Him and His glory. Their big task was, in other words, to go to all the nations all over the world and teach the people about Jesus and make them His disciples, so that they

could in turn do the same again.

But Jesus did not only give them a big task. He also made them an awesome promise. He said: “Remember, I will always be with you.” Isn’t that wonderful? Jesus was going to ascend to heaven, but at the same time he would be right there with them. It is difficult to understand, but Jesus was going to be in two places at the same time.

Maybe I can explain it: If I tell you that I am going to leave you, and I go to the room in the back, the one with the window overlooking the church. I will be in a different room, and maybe you will not be

able to see me. But actually I am right here with you, because there is just a window between us, and I can see exactly what you are doing. If you call me, I can hear you and respond. In the same way, heaven is not far away from us. Jesus can hear every word we say and He can see us. He can also hear what we say.

After Jesus gave them this promise, He was taken up into heaven right before their eyes.

As we can see, the promise that Jesus gave to His disciples that day, was not only for them. It is for you and me today as well. He kept His promise, and He is still

with us today.

And the instruction He gave them is also meant for each one of us today. We must teach people about Jesus and make them His disciples. That is exactly what I have been doing every Saturday. And that is also why I have been telling you so many times that you should tell others about Jesus. It is not just something I have made up. It is a command that Jesus gave each one of us! Today I am putting that instruction to practice by teaching you how to be disciples.

The big question is: what does a disciple of Jesus do? I am a

disciple of Jesus, and so is Peter and Paul. What have the three of us been doing over the past few years? We have been teaching you about Jesus and what a follower of Jesus should do. In other words, we are teaching you to also become disciples. Jesus did not say: “Go and tell people about Me.” He said: “Go and make disciples.”

When you then become disciples, it means that each one of you should go and do the same. In other words, you should also start making disciples for Jesus.

Does this mean that each one of

you must now start preaching? No! It simply means that each one of us was given the task by Jesus to be instruments in the process of making other people disciples. Actually, we are all part of a big team. Each one of the team has a different task. My task here is to teach you guys about the Bible and what Jesus wants us to do. But there is only one of me. I cannot go to all the people in Stanger and Shakas Head and Ngobongo to teach them about Jesus. But if you can bring them here, or tell them about Simunye ku Jesu, then I can talk to them as well.

Maybe you say that it is a difficult task to talk to other people about Jesus. But there is an answer to that.

Jesus made the disciples a promise that He would send them the Holy Spirit to give them the wisdom and power to be able to perform their task. That same promise is for you and me as well. He is right here to equip us to be disciple-makers. All He wants you to do, is to be willing to take on the task.

Are you willing to learn from us and take up the challenge?

Pentecost (1)

Acts 2:1-13

Jesus spoke to His disciples on a mountain in Galilee, where He gave them instructions. He told them to go to all the nations of the earth and to make people His disciples. He also instructed them to go to Jerusalem. They had to wait there for something awesome that was going to happen. But Jesus also gave them some promises. He told them that He would always be with them, even though He was going to heaven. But He also promised them that He would send them the Holy Spirit. And

then an amazing thing happened: He was taken up into heaven right before their eyes.

Two weeks later there was a very big Jewish festival, called the festival of Pentecost. Jewish people came to Jerusalem from all over the world to take part in the festival. There were large crowds of people, and they all spoke different languages, because they came from different countries. Luke tells us that they came from Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete and Arabia. And in

each country they spoke a different language.

Of course the disciples did what Jesus asked them to do, and they also went to Jerusalem. On that Pentecost Sunday morning all of them were gathered together in a house in Jerusalem. They were talking about all the things that happened over the past two months. And they were wondering what Jesus actually meant when He said that something great was going to happen to them in Jerusalem.

Then slowly they became aware of something very, very strange. They could feel that they were not

alone in the room. There was a strange sound building up and the people in the room could feel that something awesome was busy happening. The sound became louder and louder, something like a great wind or a huge storm. But the strange thing is that there was no wind! They could not understand at all what was happening. Eventually this mighty sound filled the whole house. It felt like everything was trembling. You can imagine that these guys were terrified!

But that was not all. Suddenly one of the guys shouted: “Look! There is a fire!” Everybody looked

up to where the guy was pointing. Then they saw the most awesome sight, something that looked like fire, coming into the room from nowhere and just hanging above them in mid-air. Then the fire started to divide into many smaller fires, something that looked like flames. Each of these flames slowly moved to the different people in the room and settled on their heads. Each one of these disciples had a flame on their heads!

The moment this happened, everybody in the room changed in some way. It was as if “something” had entered into

them that made them completely different. Suddenly each one of them received great spiritual power. Then they realised that it was actually the Holy Spirit Who came down and filled each one of them, just like Jesus told them on the mountain.

But it was not only inside this room that things were happening on that Sunday morning. This mighty sound in the room was so great that it was heard all over Jerusalem. Remember, there were thousands of people from all over the world gathering in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival. When the people heard

this sound, they came running to this house from all over the city, because they were curious to find out what caused it. Nobody had ever heard anything like this before. Within minutes, there were thousands of people crowding around the house.

And then another amazing thing happened: The disciples who were together inside the house, went outside and they started talking to this large crowd. They told the people about the great things that God had done. They told them about Jesus Who was crucified. He died and was buried, but then He rose from the dead.

He is alive and He is the Messiah, the Saviour! But the greatest miracle was that each one of the thousands of people heard this wonderful message in their own language. Those people could simply not believe their own ears! How was that possible?

They just stood there and listened and shook their heads, because these guys talking to them were not Rabbi's and learned men! They were very ordinary people. They were fishermen from Galilea! Those guys were not very clever! And the people said: "How is this possible?" One guy shook his head: "They are stone drunk!

That is the only explanation I can think of!”

Then one of the guys stepped forward, a real rough fisherman named Peter. And he started explaining to the people what this was all about. They were not drunk, but something awesome happened to them. Then he started telling them about Jesus.

Next time I will tell you a bit more about Peter and his wonderful speech

Do you perhaps want to say: “Oh, I so much wish that the Holy Spirit could also come into this church today, onto all of us so that we

could be like Peter and his friends”?

Well, I have news for you: it has already happened!

But how is that possible? Did anybody see it happen?

It happened 2000 years ago, on that Sunday of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was not only poured out on those disciples, but He was poured out on all people. From that day on, the Holy Spirit is inside every person that believes in Jesus. The moment you say “Yes” to Jesus, the Holy Spirit moves into your life and fills you.

What does the Holy Spirit do in your life? He gives you power. Not physical power, but power to do things for God. He also gives you wisdom so that you will know to say the right things at the right time. He gives you insight into the Word of God. When you read the Bible, He talks to you. He gives you courage so that you will not be scared of people.

Unfortunately most Christians do not give the Holy Spirit enough space to live inside them and work through them.

What must you do to let the Holy Spirit give you all these things? Firstly you must be prepared to

get rid of the sin, the bad things in your life, then there will be more space for the Holy Spirit inside you.

Then you must say to Him that you are willing and available to do what He wants you to do.

The third thing is that you must be willing to learn from Him. Read the Bible, because that is the way He talks to you and teaches you.

Pentecost (2)

Acts 2:37-47

We heard that all Jesus' disciples went to Jerusalem because Jesus told them to wait there on the Holy Spirit. On the Pentecost Sunday, while they were gathered in a room, they suddenly heard a mighty sound, something like a strong wind. Then the Holy Spirit came down on them in the form of a fire, and little flames settled on their heads.

In the meantime thousands of people in Jerusalem ran to this house where they were gathered to find out what the mighty sound

was. Remember, there were people from all over the world, from Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete and Arabia. And in each country they spoke a different language. All these people gathered outside this house where the Holy Spirit came down.

Then the disciples came out and told the people about the great things that God had done. But the miracle was that each one of the thousands of people heard this wonderful message in their own

language - Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, English, Xhoza, Zulu and even Afrikaans????!

They could not understand how this was possible, that each person could hear the message in his own language. Some of them even said that these guys were drunk! If I suddenly start speaking in a strange language, Greek, Hebrew or German, you might also think that I have gone cookoos!

Then one of the guys stepped forward, k a real rough fisherman named Peter. He started explaining to the people what this

was all about. He said that these guys were definitely not drunk. Then he told them about Jesus Who was crucified and died. He was buried in a grave, but God raised Him from the dead and He was now ruling over the entire universe. He told them that Jesus is the Christ, He is God and that they had to believe in Him.

Do you remember what happened to Peter on the night before Jesus was crucified? When a girl asked him if he was one of Jesus' friends, Peter said: "No! I don't even know who He is!" He was scared and he was hiding. Before that horrible night,

Peter often said the wrong things at the wrong times. He often made promises that he could not keep. Once Jesus even said to him: “Go away Satan!”

Now we see a totally different Peter! What happened to him? Is it possible that this could be the same Peter, who was now suddenly preaching and telling thousands of people about Jesus? What happened to him? Why this dramatic change?

It was the Holy Spirit that came into Peter’s life. He is the One who made this huge difference. Thousands of people stood in amazement, listening to him.

Everybody was deeply touched, because they could see that Peter was very enthusiastic about what he said. Because of the way he spoke to the people, 3000 of them became Christians on that one single day!

Now remember: Peter was a simple fisherman. He did not go to university to learn about all these things. And he was scared of what people could do to him. He was even too scared to tell anybody that he knew Jesus. But after the Holy Spirit entered him, he was not scared any more. He could step forward and talk openly about Jesus. But also, he

knew exactly what to say. He did not say all the wrong things any more, like he used to do before. He did not spend hours to prepare a sermon so that he could say wonderful things. He simply stood up, and God gave him the right words in his mouth. He told the people what God put in his heart.

And the result was that 3000 people believed him and also gave their hearts to Jesus.

But that was definitely not the end of the story. If we read further what Luke wrote in the book of Acts, we see that all these people changed dramatically in some

way. It was not only Peter who changed, it was also all the people who heard the message that day and started believing in Jesus. We read some amazing stories of how people started sharing their possessions with the poor people. They started caring for each other. Some of them even sold their properties and used that money to help the poor ones amongst them.

We also see that these new believers started coming together regularly. They would eat together and share their food and also talk about the things that they believed in. They learned from

each other and they learned from the Apostles like Peter and John.

All the people in Jerusalem liked these new Christians because they would beam out love and only do good things to others.

Tomorrow it is Pentecost. What are your expectations of Pentecost this year? In our story today, we heard about people who were changed dramatically when the Holy Spirit came over them. Peter was a totally different person. Suddenly he was not shy any more, and he spoke with courage, wisdom and authority.

The people who listened to him,

also changed into loving, caring people who worshipped God.

What about me and you? How are we going to change?

Last week we said to each other that the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual power, wisdom, insight into the Word of God and courage. To be able to get these things, we must get rid of our sins. But we must also be willing to be available for Him. Then we must be willing to learn from Him by reading the Bible and going to church.

But all these things will help absolutely nothing, if we do not

go and put it all into practice. If I go to someone and I say: “Please, I need a job!” and the person says “Yes!” What do I do? I don’t sing “I’ve got a job!” and then sit and do nothing! I start working, of course!

If I pray: “Holy Spirit, use me!” and I sit and do nothing, then it is worthless. I must be prepared to do what He asks me to do. If it is to reach out to somebody in love, then I must do it! If it is to help somebody, then I must go and do it! In other words, my head must be in heaven, but my feet firmly on the ground. Spiritually I must be open to the Holy Spirit, and at

the same time I must do the work of God right here on earth.

Peter and the Beggar

Acts 3:1-10

Today I want to tell you a real-life story of something that happened to the people who experienced that first Pentecost, to show you what could happen when you have the Holy Spirit in you.

One afternoon Peter and John were walking to the Temple in Jerusalem. This was some time after Pentecost, that wonderful day when the Holy Spirit was poured out on everybody who believed in Jesus. When they got to the temple, they saw a man sitting at the gate. This man was

paralysed. He could not use his legs. He had been paralysed like this all his life. Every day his family would carry him to the temple so that he could sit there and beg for money.

When Peter saw the man, he walked up to him. The man smiled. He thought that Peter was going to give him some money. But Peter told him: “Sorry, I have no money.” The poor man’s face dropped. He was just starting to get excited. Then Peter said: “But I have something else to give you.” He reached out with his hand to the man, and then, as he grabbed the man’s hand, he said:

“In the Name of Jesus, stand up and walk!”

Peter told the man to do something totally impossible. This poor man had never walked one single step in his whole life. No doctor could cure him. This sort of thing simply does not happen!

But then, the moment Peter took the man’s hand, he could feel life flowing into his dead legs. He jumped up and started walking. He could not believe his own eyes! Was he just dreaming? He started jumping up and down. Everything was working perfectly for the first time in his life!

“Hey look!” he shouted at everybody, “Look, I can walk! Praise God! He healed me! I can walk!” He was dancing circles around Peter and John, and he danced and sang “Praise God!” all the way, right into the temple.

For many years this man had been sitting at the temple’s gate every day. So everybody in the city knew him very well. When this wonderful miracle happened, the news spread like wild fire. People came running from all over the city to see for themselves. Nobody could believe that such a wonderful miracle could happen. Very soon

there was a huge crowd of people around the man. “How did this happen?” they all asked him.

Then he pointed to Peter: “He was responsible for this. He told me to stand up. And now I can walk! Praise God! Isn’t this a wonderful miracle?!”

Then Peter stepped forward and he said to them: “Why are you surprised? Do you really think it was I who healed the man? No it was not me, it was God, He is the One who did this! He worked through Jesus. It is the same Jesus that you killed! He was innocent, but you crucified Him. But this same Jesus was raised

from the dead. I saw him with my own eyes!”

Peter also told the people that Jesus is the only One who can give life and healing, and that He will also forgive sins. The Jews did something terrible to Jesus - they killed Him. But He was prepared to forgive even that horrible sin. All He wanted was for those people to accept Him as their Saviour. In other words, they had to believe in Him.

Can you believe that this was the same Peter who said, only a few months earlier, that he did not even know who this Jesus was? When one of the servant girls

asked Peter if he was one of Jesus's friends, Peter said that he did not know Jesus! He lied to save his own skin. But now it is a totally different Peter. Now he is not afraid any more to speak about Jesus. Why? It was all because of Pentecost, when God gave the Christians the Holy Spirit to guide them and to give them the power they needed to build God's new church. He also gave them the courage to speak.

Today we can learn a few very valuable lessons from this amazing story. The first thing we learn is that absolutely nothing is impossible with God. Miracles did

not stop the day that Jesus went back into heaven. The first miracles happened to the friends of Jesus soon after He left. And many miracles followed this one.

Do miracles still happen today? Indeed yes! Miracles happen every day. If only we are prepared to look for them, we will see many miracles happen every day. God is not just up there somewhere, He is right here with us, and He cares very much for us. I have seen many miracles that God did. I have seen people cured where medically it was impossible for them to be healed.

The second valuable lesson we

learn from this story, is that when we experience a miracle, we must thank and praise God for it. We must also tell other people about it so that they will know that God is great.

There is a third very valuable lesson in this story: God uses things like this so that people can learn about Him, and believe in Him. God also uses it to give believers the opportunity to testify about Him, and to use the miracle that happened as an illustration of God's love and grace and almighty power. Many of the people who witnessed the miracle that day, became believers.

The fourth lesson is that we have the Holy Spirit in us today, just like Peter and his friends. And in the very same way He will give us the wisdom and power and courage to speak for Him and about Him.

But there is another very important message in this story. I told you that the people that killed Jesus could get God's forgiveness for their terrible sins. In the same way God tells us today that we could also get God's forgiveness for our sins. He is willing to forget about all the bad things we did in the past, if we only believe in Jesus. To

believe in Jesus means that we must enter into a relationship with Him. If we do that, He sets us free from the bonds of Satan and gives us a brand new life.

What does this life look like? It is a life where we do the things that please God. Why? To say thank you to God for setting us free and giving us eternal life.

Just think of the difference this made to that paralysed man. Before Jesus came into his life, he was gloomy and all he did all day long was to sit and beg. The moment Jesus entered into his life, he jumped up and started dancing and singing and telling

everybody how great God is.

That is what God wants you and me to do as well. We must sing and dance with joy and let everybody know that God is wonderful!q

Obey God

Acts 5:17-20 & 26-29

Last time we heard about the things that happened on the day of the Pentecost - when the Holy Spirit was poured out. That day three thousand people came to believe in Jesus. We also saw how Peter and the other Apostles changed. Suddenly they were not afraid any more. They spoke openly to the people and told them about Jesus. They were not hiding away any more.

But there were people that were not happy with this. The High Priest and the Jewish Council did

not like what was going on. They were the people that crucified Jesus. And now all Jesus' followers were going around, telling everybody that Jesus was alive - that He rose from the dead. And they told people that if they believed in Jesus, they would get everlasting life.

The High Priest sent his soldiers to go and arrest the leaders - Peter and John. They brought the two of them before the court. When they started questioning them, Peter said to them: "You are the people who killed Jesus! Jesus is the only One Who can give salvation. And it is

impossible for us not to speak about Him.”

So the High Priest told them that they better keep quiet - they must stop talking about Jesus, otherwise they will be prosecuted.

So what do you think these guys did? Did they keep quiet after all that threatening? No! They simply kept on telling everybody about Jesus.

Of course the authorities were furious! They were scared that this new “sect” would spread like a disease. So, after a while they sent their soldiers again to go and arrest Peter and John. They threw

them in jail and locked them up behind bars.

But that night something amazing happened: God sent an angel to go and set the two of them free. The angel let them out of the jail, and locked the steel doors. There were guards at the doors, but they did not even notice when then Peter and John escaped.

The angel told them that God wanted them to go back to the temple and preach. They must go and stand in the temple and tell everybody about Jesus.

So early the next morning they went to the temple and started telling everybody about Jesus.

In the meantime the High Priest and the full Jewish council got together for their important court hearing. They were going to sentence these two bad guys that they had locked up in jail. They sent some soldiers to go and fetch Peter and John. But after a while the soldiers came running back. “They are gone!” they shouted. They told the High Priest that something very strange happened, because the doors were still locked, and the guards were still standing at the door, but

there was nobody inside. It is totally impossible for anybody to get out!

Then someone else came running into the court room: “I saw them!” he shouted, “Those two guys that we locked up last night - they are busy preaching in the temple!”

“How is that possible? How did they get out? Go and fetch them!”

So the soldiers went off to go and get Peter and John. But they did not arrest them - they simply asked them to please come with them, because they were scared of these two men and they were

scared that the people would throw stones at them if they arrested them.

So when they were brought before the court, the High Priest said to them: “Did I not tell you to stop teaching about Jesus? Now look what you have done - the whole of Jerusalem is talking about your preaching! And you are holding us responsible for the death of Jesus!”

So Peter answered him: “We must obey God rather than people.”

If God tells you to do something, say for instance to tell people

about Jesus. And the people tell you to stop preaching here. What would you do? Who will you listen to? If you keep on telling people about Jesus, the people might get cross with you - you might lose your friends. People might even chase you away. Would you still do what God told you to do?

When Peter told them this, they were furious. They wanted to kill Peter and John. But then one of the old wise men stood up - his name is Gamaliel. He told Peter and John to go and stand outside. He then said to the others: "We must be very careful what we do with these guys. I think we must

just let them go. If the things they do are just their own doctrine, then it will eventually die away. But if it is really the work of God, then none of us will be able to stop it. Don't fight against God!"

They then brought the two men back. They told them that if they ever spoke to people about Jesus again, there would be big, big trouble. Then they got the soldiers to whip the two of them, and after that they released them.

Do you know what Peter and John did after that? Did they go home to cry about the horrible things that happened to them? No! They were rejoicing! They

were glad that they could suffer for Jesus. And they went straight back to the temple and simply carried on teaching the people about Jesus every day.

Why are there so few of us here today? Did you invite somebody to come with you? Or are you scared to tell your friends that you are going to a church meeting? Are you scared to ask someone to come with you?

I do not say that it is easy - it is not! It is difficult to talk to someone about Jesus. Sometimes people reject you if you do that. But that is what God wants us to do. I have talked to

people about Jesus many times. I have been rejected too. But sometimes people respond positively. And WOW! That is the greatest thing that can ever happen to you! If someone tells me: “Yes, I want to follow Jesus!” I always want to jump through the roof with joy!

Paul Goes to Damascus

Acts 9:1-19

There was a young man living in Jerusalem by the name of Paul. He was a Pharisee. When he was still a young boy, his father brought him to Jerusalem to study. He had the best teacher in Israel, a man called Gamaliel. For many years Paul studied the Law of God and the Bible, until he qualified to become a teacher himself. By this time Paul knew the law off by heart.

Now, the law was not only the Ten Commandments, but all the prescriptions of Moses as well as

a lot of extra laws that the Pharisees implemented.

According to what Paul was taught, the Christian faith was wrong. Like most Pharisees, he believed that the Christians were busy undermining the Jewish faith. You will remember how the Pharisees hated Jesus, and how hard they tried to get rid of Him. Eventually they succeeded when they had Him crucified. They thought that it was the end of Jesus and the Christian faith.

But they did not take into account that Jesus was no ordinary human, He was, and still is God. After the resurrection, Jesus

appeared to many believers, and then on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out on all Christians. And that was only the beginning of the work of Jesus. Last week we heard that on the first day there were 3000 new believers.

Paul and the other Pharisees saw what happened, and they were worried because the Christian faith was growing at an alarming rate. So they started to persecute the Christians. They said that their faith was against the law. They arrested them and threw them into jail.

One of the Christians that they

arrested was a leader by the name of Stephen. They condemned him to death for what he believed, and then they stoned him. They hurled large stones at him until he was dead. Paul looked on as they killed Stephen, and he was satisfied.

Then Paul started prosecuting the Christians himself. The Bible tells us that he went totally mad in his prosecution, and he arrested many Christians and had them jailed. Eventually he could not find many Christians in Jerusalem any more, so he decided to go to other countries to search for Christians. When Paul and the

other Pharisees started prosecuting the Christians in Jerusalem, they fled to other countries all over the world.

Paul was informed that there were quite a lot of Christians in the city of Damascus. So he decided to take a trip there and seek out every one of them. He even got letters from the High Priest to go and persecute Christians in Damascus. He took a whole team of helpers with him.

But then something happened on the way, something that Paul had never bargained on. They were almost in Damascus, when suddenly there was a bright light

that shone from the sky and totally blinded Paul.

He fell to the ground and then he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?" This voice came from up there somewhere. Paul was frightened. The other people that were with Paul also heard the voice, but they could not see anybody.

Then Paul asked: "Who are you, Lord?"

Then the voice answered him: "I am Jesus, whom you persecute. But get up and go into the city, where you will be told what you

must do."

The people with him helped him to get up, but then he got the shock of his life: he was blind! Everything was pitch black! And Paul was scared.

They helped him to get to Damascus, like Jesus commanded him to do, and then his helpers went back home to Jerusalem, and left him on his own. They left him with a man called Judas, and there Paul stayed for the next three days. He did not eat anything, and he did not even drink water. All he did for the whole three days was to pray. He was confused, because he

thought that he was doing the right thing by prosecuting the Christians. And now God spoke to him from heaven and told him that it was wrong! Paul did not know what to do. So he just kept on praying and asking God what He wanted him to do.

In the meantime, there was a certain Christian living in Damascus by the name of Ananias. One night he had a strange dream: he dreamt that God spoke to him, and He told Ananias to go to a certain address to a man called Judas. In his house he would find Paul, where he was busy praying.

Ananias got the fright of his life, because he knew exactly who this Paul was. He was the guy who was prosecuting all the Christians! And he heard the news that Paul was on his way to Damascus to come and arrest all the Christians and have them locked up in prison. Ananias told God that Paul was really bad news. But God told Ananias that He had chosen Paul to go to all the heathen people to tell them about Jesus.

When Ananias woke up, he knew exactly what to do. He went to Straight Street where Judas lived, and there he found Paul, exactly

like in his dream. He laid his hands on Paul and prayed for him.

And then the amazing thing happened: this staunch Pharisee who was prosecuting all the Christians, was filled with the Holy Spirit. But that was not all: something like fish scales fell from his eyes, and suddenly he could see again.

Paul got up and for the first time in three days he had something to eat. He was also baptised, and he became a real Christian, just like the others that he once persecuted.

This was the beginning of a beautiful story. Later Paul became the great missionary who went all over the world to preach the gospel.

Today we can learn that no matter how bad you are, it is in God's power to save you and give you everlasting life. But even much more than that, to use you in His kingdom. Paul was one of the worst. He murdered God's people, but God gave him forgiveness. He gave him another chance in life to really do something. All Paul had to do, was to say "Yes" to God. And he did just so, and became the

biggest missionary ever!

Today God also gives us a new chance to make a choice. We could carry on like we used to, or we can decide to follow Jesus like Paul did. You have a choice: You can choose to live your own life, or you can choose to follow God and do something for Him and for other people. How are you going to choose today?

Singing in Jail

Acts 16:16-40

We heard the story about how Paul met Jesus at Damascus. A few years passed, in which Paul learned a lot about Jesus, and he became a Pastor in the city of Antioch. One day the Holy Spirit spoke to the church. God wanted them to do missionary work. So the church sent Paul to the heathen countries to spread the gospel.

One day Paul went to the city of Philippi. There he preached the Word of God and told the people about Jesus. Three other

missionaries worked with Paul: Silas, Timothy and Luke. One day while they were walking through the streets of the city, a young girl came rushing up behind them, shouting: “These men are the servants of God!” Now that sounds very nice of her, isn’t it? But there was a problem. She did not stop, she kept on shouting and shouting the same thing over and over again.

The problem was that this girl was a fortune teller. Everybody came to her to hear what was going to happen to them in the future. She was a slave and her boss made a lot of money for this service she

gave. The next day this girl was there again, following Paul and his companions, and she was shouting over and over and over: “These men are the servants of God!”

Eventually Paul realised that there was an evil spirit in her. He turned around to the woman, and told this evil spirit, the demon inside her: “In the Name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” Immediately this bad spirit left the woman and she became normal.

But there was a small problem: when this woman became normal, she was no longer a

fortune teller. Of course that was very good, but remember she was a slave, and her owner did not think it was good at all. Now she could not earn him money any more! The man was furious! He gathered his friends and they grabbed Paul and his friend Silas. They dragged them to the magistrate, and the man shouted: "These men were responsible that I lost my income!" By that time there were lots of people, all shouting. Then they told the magistrate: "These people are very dangerous! They are Jews, and they are causing a lot of trouble in our city. Put them in

jail!”

So the magistrate said “OK”, but before they could go to jail, they first had to be whipped. So they tied Paul and Silas to a pole, and a soldier came with a whip with pieces of metal on the end. He whipped them until the blood was streaming from their backs.

Then he took them to the jail. The jail was not a nice, modern building like today's jails, but it was a dark, stinking hole with no windows and no toilets. There the soldier clamped chains on their arms, screwed their feet into a block. There the two men were lying on the cold, dirty stone floor.

Can you imagine how the poor guys must have felt? They were in terrible pain, and they did not even do anything wrong. The place was stinking, and the dirt was getting into their raw wounds. What do you think the poor men did? Were they crying? Were they moaning? Were they swearing?

No! Paul started singing. And then Silas joined him. The other prisoners thought: “Hey, these two guys have gone mad! How can you sing when you are beaten up like them? They are bleeding and they are chained - how is it possible to sing when you feel like this?”

Paul and Silas were not singing sad songs: they were singing happy songs. They were praising God! “Praise Him, praise Him! Mbonge, mbonge! Mbonge ekuseni, mbonge nisamini.” Their beautiful songs filled the prison, and everybody was listening to these two men as they were singing from the bottom of their hearts. They were singing about joy and love and about Jesus who is so good to them. They were singing praises to God.

And then suddenly something happened: The steel gates of the prison started rattling. The walls were trembling, and the prisoners

could all feel the floor beneath them shuddering. They got a big fright: what was happening? Then the chains on their arms and legs just fell off. The poor prisoners were trembling with fear. But it was not over yet: the prison doors just flew open by themselves. God had sent an angel to do all this.

The chief jailer woke up from this big commotion, and he came running in to see what happened. When he got there, he saw all the prison doors wide open. The poor man nearly died from shock, because he knew that he was in big, big trouble. He thought that

all the prisoners had escaped. So he pulled out his sword to kill himself, because it was better for him to die like that.

When Paul saw what was happening, he called the jailer and told him that all the prisoners were still there. They were too scared to run away.

The man fell on his knees before Paul. That night this jailer gave his heart to Jesus and he also became a Christian.

What do we learn from this lovely story? We see that Paul and Silas had no reason to be happy. They got beaten up and thrown in jail

for nothing. Yet, they were happy. Why? Because they had Jesus in their hearts. They were not happy because they were in jail, but they were happy in spite of the fact that they were there.

What about us? Sometimes we have a hard time. Maybe somebody said something bad about me, and now I am hurt, unhappy and angry. The fact is, that if you are unhappy, you just make things worse for yourself. You make yourself feel bad. Forget about it and forgive that other person, and you will see what wonders it will do to yourself.

Sometimes you sigh and moan and cry because things have gone wrong for you. Maybe you lost your job, or somebody stole your money. You have every reason to feel very unhappy. I know what it feels like, because I have also been through very hard times in my life. But then I tried what Paul did. To worry and feel sorry for myself, was not going to make things any better.

So I started singing joyful songs like Paul and Silas. Today I am very, very happy, because I have Jesus in my life. Nobody can take that away from me. But it is not only me getting happiness from

this: I know that I am also bringing joy to all the people that I meet. They see the joy of Jesus in me, and then they also want to be like this. If I live like this, with real joy in my heart, then I make other people hungry for the love and joy of Jesus.

Gifts from the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 12

Have you ever heard of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? What does it actually mean? If you don't know, then you don't have to feel embarrassed, because most Christians do not know what it means. Even the church in Corinth did not know, so the Apostle Paul had to explain to them.

Of course a gift is something that you get for free from somebody - something you do not really deserve. It is exciting to get a gift, isn't it? And what does a gift look

like? What kind of gifts do you get? Chocolates, a pen, pretty soap, clothes for your baby, shoes, a Bible, a book, a cell phone, a CD - there are many different kinds of gifts.

The question is, what do you do when you get a gift?

Of course the very first thing is to say thank you to the person who gave you the gift. You are going to give her a hug and kiss her to show that you really appreciate it.

And then? Are you going to put it away in a cupboard and forget about it? No! If somebody gives you a cell phone, you are going to

use it. You are going to phone your friends and talk to them over the phone.

In the scripture that we read this morning, Paul also tells us about gifts. But these gifts are slightly different from the small gifts that we spoke about just now. The gifts that Paul talks about are very useful gifts that won't just last a few weeks or maybe a year - they will last all your life. These are precious gifts that God gives us, and in the same way they are meant to be used - we do not just hide them somewhere in a cupboard.

What are these gifts? The first

kind of gift, Paul calls Spiritual Gifts. These are gifts that the Holy Spirit gives you.

There are gifts of your mind - wisdom and knowledge of God. He gives it to you from the Bible. There are gifts of faith in God, healing and doing wonders. Then there are also the gifts of speaking God's message and speaking in strange tongues.

God does not give everybody the same gifts - He gives one person a gift and another a totally different gift. And the spiritual gifts are not the only kind of gifts that God gives us.

Some of us are good leaders, others are good listeners. It is a wonderful gift to be able to sit and listen with interest to a person who has a big problem. You don't have to tell that person what to do, but by just listening, the person is often relieved of his problem.

Another gift could be to simply go and talk to somebody who is lonely.

But that is still just the beginning. God has given us many other kinds of gifts. Petro received the wonderful gift of music - she can play the guitar and she can sing. Sarie also received a wonderful

gift - the gift of caring about people in other countries where the Christians are oppressed. She is not scared to go to those countries and to talk to those people, and even give them Bibles, while the authorities in those countries could punish her if they found out what she is doing.

Maybe you are saying: “I never got any gifts - it would be so nice to also be able to play a guitar. All I can do is to cook or clean houses or iron or do gardening.”

I have a surprise for you - all those things are gifts that God gave you. I haven't got the gift of

ironing. Give me an iron, and I will burn holes in the clothes! I will become bored if I have to do housework every day - it is definitely not my gift. We all got different gifts.

The question is, if I am more important because I have the gift of preaching? Am I more important than the lady who can only do ironing? Who is the most important person in the church? The minister or pastor? No!

Paul tells us that the one is not more important than the other. The pastor is not more important than the lady who sweeps the floors of the church. If the church

is not clean, nobody will come to listen to the pastor's sermon.

Paul says that if we look at our own body, which part is the most important? Is it your heart? Or maybe your head or arms or your eyes or ears? Which one is the most important, do you think?

Maybe your eyes are the most important, because without them you cannot see. But then what about your eyelids - they mean nothing, or your eyelashes - that is just hair. If you do not have eyelashes, then the dust will get into your eyes, and it could damage your eyes. If you do not have eyelids, your eyes will dry

out, and you will become blind. So which is the most important? They are all equally important, because the one cannot function without the other.

What about your toes? They are useless things that dangle off your feet - they have no function! Really? A friend of mine once had a small accident, and his big toe was cut off. No big deal! But then he found out that he lost his balance. The big toe was very important to balance him.

Every part of your body is important, and the one cannot function properly without the other. In exactly the same way

each one of us Christians are equally important, each with his own unique talent. I am not more important than Petro, and she is not more important than any one of you. We need each other to be able to function as the church of Christ.

And that is why it is of such great importance that each one of us must use the talents that God gave us so that the church can function properly. God does not use angels to let His church function - He uses very ordinary people like you and me.

If your eyes suddenly decide that they are not going to work today,

what will happen? You will get totally lost and bump into things and get hurt - your whole body will suffer.

If one of us decides that she is not going to bring her part in the church today, then everybody is going to suffer. And maybe that is the reason why the church is suffering so much today, because so many of God's children just sit back and do not do what God wants them to do, or they hide their talents away in a cupboard and do not use them as God wants them to do.

Come, let us all start using all our talents for God and for His

church.