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In This Issue

JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

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Editorial Introduction *page 3*

Editor, Major Stephen Court

Selling the Gospel *page 5*

Major Beverley Smith

How Can I Be Silent? *page 8*

Major Osei Stewart

Eliza Shirley: Missionary Pioneer for The Salvation Army in America

Aaron White

page 10

The Salvation Army and Incarnationalism *page 13*

Aaron White

Message from Mark 1:4-11 *page 26*

Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield

Message from Matthew 25:1-13 *page 30*

Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield

Message from Ezekiel 34:11-16; 20-24 *page 34*

Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield

Message from Psalm 90:13 *page 38*

Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield

Imagine: or, A Women's Uniform Rant *page 42*

Danielle Strickland

Editorial Introduction

Major Stephen Court, editor

Greetings in Jesus' name. Mercy and grace to you from God our Father. Welcome to the 113th edition of Journal of Aggressive Christianity!

Loyal JAC readers will note that we're coming off a string of themed issues: JAC112 GO FORWARD (addressing General Rader's High Council speech); JAC111 the 500th Anniversary REFORMATION issue (with guest editor Colonel Richard Munn), JAC110 Engaging Needham (with contributors interacting with Needham's Missional Salvationism article), JAC109 Five Books volume 3, JAC108 - Training Flavour (with many cadets contributing articles), JAC107 - the Danielle Strickland issue, JAC106 - Solemn Assembly issue, JAC105 - the Infinitum Issue, JAC104 - the Brookshaw Issue (Captain Pete Brookshaw), etc.

And, God-willing, we'll be coming back in JAC114 with a major themed ebook issue. But we haven't forgotten our general readership, and recognise that for some a theme can exclude potential readers. So JAC113 is eclectic!

We've a handful of contributors with different connections to JAC and this issue.

First up, Major Beverley Smith (Canada and Bermuda) writes about 'Selling The Gospel'. My current vocational and organisational focus is on evangelism and Major Smith has some good ideas and encouragement on this issue.

Major Osei Stewart (USA Western) wrote a penetrating response to racial conflict in his country some time ago called 'How Can I Be Silent?'. I've saved it for the right season and received permission to run it in JAC113. Unrelated connection? Among other things, the Major took responsibility for the Every City Campaign (Stage 2) after moves last summer.

Ministry Director Aaron White (Canada and Bermuda) has two pieces, one on 'Eliza Shirley: Missionary Pioneer for The Salvation Army in America', and the other on 'The Salvation Army and Incarnationalism. Connection? The Whites succeeded us in an appointment many years ago (that they retain today!).

And Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield is our Corps officer (Canada and Bermuda). I'm convinced that soldiers of this corps are 'spoiled' by the depth of her insightful preaching week in and week out (she follows the lectionary). So, you get a taste of it, here with messages from Mark 1, Matthew 25, Ezekiel 34, and Psalm 90.

Finally, Danielle Strickland (also Canada and Bermuda), goes on one of her patented JAC Rants, this time called, 'Imagine: or, A Women's Uniform Rant'. Strickland is closely related to the editor of Journal of Aggressive Christianity.

As usual, thanks to the contributors; thanks to your for reading it; and thanks to Major Don Grad for handling the technical aspects of producing 113 issues of Journal of Aggressive Christianity going all the way back to the past century. Please read deeply and share widely. And if you get through all of JAC113 before JAC114 comes out, take a deep dive into JAC1-112!

May God use the contents of this issue to accelerate the advance of the salvation war so that all kinds of people submit their lives to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Selling the Gospel

Major Beverley Smith

A persistent salesman knocked on a door only to have the man who answered say “I don’t need anything today”. The next day the salesman returned and was told “Stay away” by the man. The next day the salesman came back. “You again! I warned you!” shouted the man, so angry he spat in the salesman’s face. The salesman smiled, wiped off the spit with a handkerchief and said to the man “Must be raining.” He got his sale.

The gospel is not a sales pitch, said Relevant Magazine’s Kimmie Lucas. “We do not peddle the word of God for profit” echoed the apostle Paul in a similar vein. Yet Jesus described the kingdom of heaven as a dragnet, disciples as fishermen, evangelists as harvesters, and himself as THE WORD, implying that, especially in this day of information overload, skills in communication, getting noticed, and hooking someone, not to mention closing the deal are all involved in attracting others to Christ. And let’s admit it. Many of us have found ourselves sold on something we never would have imagined, just because of the skills of the seller. We owe our current stellar Salvation Army reputation to our forebears selling the gospel not only by being practical providers of hospitality, food and shelter, due to their loving concern for others, but also by their skills of persuasion on the streets and from the pulpit. So are there some things we can learn from sales theory to propagate the gospel?

Accept that we’re all in sales

Of course we do not peddle the word of God *for profit*, but we do peddle it. Whether we are in family services, corrections, territorial headquarters or corps officership, we are selling the idea of salvation to whoever we meet. We start with ourselves. Whether it’s our Facebook page or the clothes we wear, we are presenting ourselves in a particular way to influence others. When that influence can make a difference in someone else’s life, we’re pleased. But we also recognize that lasting difference only comes from the eternal power we know as Jesus Christ. Whenever we pray the Lord’s prayer “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven”, we are asking God to give his power to our influence to bring his kingdom to bear in every situation in which we find ourselves.

Ask questions instead of delivering a pitch

According to researchers Ibrahim Senay and Dolores Albarracin, we are more likely to accomplish goals with interrogative self-talk than simply cheerleading. The ‘little engine that could’ should have used questioning self-talk “Can I get to the top of the mountain?” instead of his well-loved phrase “I think I can, I think can, I thought I could” in order to crest the hill. When we ask ourselves “Can I do this?” the question helps us to tap into inner (and higher) resources rather than trying to psych ourselves up to forcefully or unnaturally deliver good news to our neighborhood. We ask ourselves questions when we begin the task of evangelism “Can I influence this person for

Christ?” Clearly the answer is yes if the Holy Spirit has already gone ahead of us as we believe He has. A little faith goes a long way. But what about asking questions of those who don't know Christ instead of bombarding them with information totally foreign to them. Jesus found this technique worked better than a statement at the Samaritan well “Can I have a drink?” rather than “You need Me to save you from your destructive lifestyle.” “What do you think of God?” might be a good place to start with someone, while asking **yourself** some questions. What do we have in common? And what are my neighbor's needs and goals?

Don't offer too many choices

With the information superhighway we don't need mediators finding the right information for us. We can all do our digging on the internet. But we do need an information curator, someone who helps carve down the choices into a manageable few. It is true that if a donut store offers too many choices in donuts, their sales drop. People can only take in so many varieties. Information curators help us ask the right questions and frame simple ways to accomplish our goals, showing us the way to accept Jesus, help out at the food drive, do the 5 K walk or simply donate, with the least amount of effort and trouble. Oops that's too many choices for you to process.

Use contrasts to raise the stakes

The story is told that copywriter/advertiser David Ogilvy met a beggar in Central Park who wasn't getting much money in his hat. His sign read “I am blind. Please help.” Ogilvy bet his companion that he could improve the blind beggar's lot just by adding a few words. He scribbled them down and sure enough, - when they passed at the end of the day, the blind beggar had increased his profits enormously. What were the words David Ogilvy added? “It is spring.... And I am blind.” When men and women passed by, they were drawn by the contrast between their situation and the blind man's. They felt blessed that they could see and enjoy the springtime in a way the beggar couldn't. And they gave.

Don't let rejection discourage you

For every person who says yes to Jesus there may be many more who hear the gospel and say no. We need to remind ourselves that rejections do not mean we're no good at evangelism. Oceans of rejection are navigated by staying afloat, as Daniel H. Pink's book “To sell is human” reminds us. We stay afloat by paying attention to self-talk, keeping our successes in mind as well as failures, and supporting each other. We also stay afloat by recognizing that the kingdom, the results and the ocean itself are the matrix of God. We live and breathe and proclaim and “sell” God while embedded in him. Whatever the results of our efforts at evangelism, we are bound as Salvationists to make others' salvation the overriding purpose of our lives. So keep going. Negative responses to the gospel are not necessarily permanent, pervasive or personal. They're just a fact of life in an increasingly secular society. If a Christian loses hope, then

everyone's in trouble, because the gospel is all about hope. "Let us press on then, never despair."

How Can I Be Silent?

Major Osei Stewart

Silent when there is hurt and pain and hate and rage
Silent when all lives matter, but that black lives do too –
we cannot ignore that fact
cause there seems to be a target on the backs of every man and woman that happens
to be black

I cannot be silent – not to my sons, though fair-skinned, but with that black man build
and that urban swagger
Christian upbringing – clean cut, doesn't seem to matter
Not if you're caught being black

I cannot be silent – not to my daughters, beauty deep and Afro haired – curves of a
black queen
Educated and well spoken, ambitious – yet it does seem that none of that matters – not
if you're caught being black

It seems like we've turned a page, maybe backwards in time or forward
Perhaps we've taken the crumpled page ripped out to keep us from seeing it and pasted
it back in – in the wrong section - Reading between the lines never to fully understand

Do not tell me that blacks should get over it – slavery ended or the civil rights era
changed things
Nothing's changed - it's just hidden – no, it is just silent
I have seen it most of my 43 years – no lie

How can I be silent?
Silent when blue lives matter, men and women, shiny badge, uniform blue - but the
rationalization of their deaths makes no sense – cause it is true that their lives matter
too
People, the sins of a few cannot be covered by the innocent protectors of me and you
To protect and serve all day and then not go home? Come on...

How can I be silent?

The world is broken, and my fists are swollen from punching
Symbolically punching - trying to beat hate with love
Ashy knees from my prayer pose,
Broken dreams – clinging hard to hope is the plight of black folk

Yet, it is through my faith that I can cope

Cause there is a Hope that changes things

You see, there is a Love who was silent
Silently taking the pain and the hurt so that you and I would not have to
Even to cover the sins of white, black and blue
To erase the pain of racism and hate
To tear down the walls that discriminate
To love unconditionally

There is a Hope to release the chains of slavery
Social injustices – in justice He frees
I make no bones of who He be
It's Jesus Christ – Capital JC

Check Him out

And when we do – there will be no room for the sin
The silent and not-so subtle evil that causes the trigger to be pulled
Black on black, blue on black, black on white, blue on white, white on black...whew!
Throw in some yellow and brown too
All that you get is sin stew
It's been silently stewing in this Melting Pot

I feel like I've gone past the point of rambling
So let me make this clear

God Loves You and all He wants for you to do is turn to Him
He will show you love
Cause God. Is. Love.
Period.

And if you have that Love
Then you Cannot. Be. Silent.
Full Stop.

Eliza Shirley: Missionary Pioneer for The Salvation Army in America

Aaron White

When it comes to stories of key Christian missionaries, women are narratively underrepresented, due to the belief held within parts of the Church that women should not preach or lead men. Thankfully, this has not stopped women from preaching the Gospel or leading missions, particularly when supported by egalitarian missional movements. The Salvation Army is one such movement, and Eliza Shirley was one of its most significant early missionaries. Shirley's story demonstrates that young women can be remarkably bold, innovative, and effective in initiating missions, and that there is no inherent gender barrier to communicating the Gospel. She also embodies the missional ethos of The Salvation Army in the late 19th century in her use of spectacle, her adoption of unorthodox locations and leadership, and her concentration on the poorest people and most notorious sinners.

Eliza Shirley was born in England in 1863, just two years prior to the launch of the Christian Mission in London, which would later become The Salvation Army. At fifteen years old, Eliza Shirley dedicated her life to the Lord at an Army mission, and her testimony so impressed William Booth that he “delegated a corps leader to approach her about becoming a full-time Salvation Army evangelist.”¹ Shirley was appointed as a Lieutenant to oversee the Corps in Bishop Auckland in 1879 at the age of sixteen, alongside another young woman. In 1878, nearly half of The Salvation Army's field officers were women, so tasking a teenage girl with leading a Corps was a typically unorthodox yet pragmatic move for the fledgling mission.² Many of the Army's expansions into new territories were the result of young women putting their lives on the line, without much organisational financing or support, and in the face of skepticism.³ The courage required for a young woman to lead mission at that time should not be underestimated, as there was still a pervasive bias against women in public or spiritual leadership, and female officers often faced verbal and physical threats.⁴ The two young female missionaries in Bishop Auckland lived in poverty, eating food that was thrown at them during open-air meetings, but saw great success after converting the worst drunks in the area.⁵

When Shirley's father moved to America for work and wrote to her of the vast number of unchurched and ungodly people there, she asked permission to begin the Army's work in Philadelphia.⁶ Booth was wary of expanding the Army's work outside of England, but nevertheless responded: “If you must go and if you should start a work, start it on the principles of The Salvation Army, and if it is a success we may see our way to take it

¹ Leslie Hammond, “Heroes of the Faith: Eliza Shirley”, *Evangelicals for Social Action*, <http://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/heroes-of-the-faith/elizashirley/>, accessed June 6, 2017.

² Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army, Vol 2 1878-1886* (Nelson: London, 1966), 6.

³ Flora Larsson, *My Best Men Are Women*, (Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1974), 22.

⁴ Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army*, 6.

⁵ “Eliza Shirley, Salvation Army Pioneer,” *History's Women*, <http://www.historyswomen.com/womenoffaith/ElizaShirley.htm>, accessed June 6, 2017.

⁶ Hammond, “Heroes”.

over.”⁷ Shirley immigrated to the United States and launched The Salvation Army’s work on the American Continent. She and her mother found a dilapidated chair factory for their first meeting hall, and overcame the owner’s reluctance to rent it to them through persistent prayer.⁸ They fixed the building, and then distributed posters saying: “Blood and Fire! The Salvation Army. Two Hallelujah females will speak and sing for Jesus in the old chair factory at Sixth and Oxford streets, Oct 5th at 11am, 3pm, 8pm. All are invited to attend.”⁹ They knew that the spectacle of women preaching would be a draw, yet only twelve people attended their first meeting, most of them trouble-makers who pelted them with rotten vegetables and mud. It was not until November that they had a providential breakthrough. Some boys had started a tar-barrel fire in the lot where the Shirley’s held their open-air meetings, and this drew in hundreds of curiosity-seekers. The family began evangelising to the crowd, singing and preaching with great energy. It was then that

the worst inebriate in Kensington, a man named Reddy, came forward and asked if God would forgive a drunk like him. The Shirleys assured him of God’s forgiving heart and led him back to their meetinghouse, with the curious crowd following. Eliza then preached to Reddy and had him kneel and pray, after which he arose cold sober.¹⁰

Once again it was a focus on the least-likely person – the poor man, the drunk, the notorious sinner - that unlocked the missional strategy for the whole area. This is reminiscent of Jesus’ meetings with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the demoniac (Mark 5:1-20), or the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-26), and the transformations and missions that resulted from these unlikely encounters.

The Shirley’s quickly built upon this success, and continued using spectacle to attract the attention of the unchurched Philadelphia residents. One newspaper reported on two “Hallelujah females” who led a march down German Town Road, singing and collecting crowds of people along the way, and culminating at the meeting hall where “every bench in the factory was filled, every foot of standing room was taken.”¹¹ The chair factory Corps became so successful that Eliza Shirley left it in the care of her parents, and set out to begin a new mission center in West Philadelphia. A year and a half later William Booth sent Commissioner George Scott Railton and seven women to America to bolster the burgeoning work that Eliza Shirley and her family had started.¹² William Booth’s own daughter, Evangeline Booth, was sent in 1896 to be the Territorial Commander of the now-thousands of American Salvationists who could trace their spiritual ancestry back to the sixteen-year-old girl from Coventry.¹³ Shirley eventually married a Salvation Army captain, and served as a Divisional Commander in America for the rest of her life. Her boldness, innovation, focus on unlikely converts, and dedication in mission were the beginning of a movement in America that would

⁷ William Booth, cited in Flora Larsson, *My Best Men Are Women*, 21-22.

⁸ Bernard Watson, *A Hundred Years War: The Salvation Army 1865-1965*, (Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1964), 33-34; Larsson, *My Best Men Are Women*, 22.

⁹ Larsson, *My Best Men Are Women*, 23.

¹⁰ Hammond, “Heroes”.

¹¹ Larsson, *My Best Men are Women*, 23.

¹² Larsson, *My Best Men are Women*, 24.

¹³ Larsson, *My Best Men are Women*, 22.

eventually boast 3.5 million soldiers, officers and volunteers.¹⁴ The Salvation Army in Philadelphia today operates the Eliza Shirley House, an emergency housing service for mothers and their children that follows in Shirley's footsteps by bringing stability to the lives of poor families, and introducing them to the love of God and the transformative beauty of Christian community.

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¹⁴ Hammond, "Heroes".

The Salvation Army and Incarnationalism

Aaron White

Jesus Christ's incarnation is one of the formational inspirations for early Salvation Army mission and ministry. The Salvation Army in its inception emphasised the importance of its soldiers and officers identifying with the poor, the oppressed, and other cultures as they ministered amongst them, and there are still Salvation Army ministries that operate in the same spirit today. There are however genuine theological and ethical concerns over the idea of incarnational ministry. Some theologians argue that it is impossible, unnecessary, or unwise for humans to imitate Christ's incarnation. Others worry about the dangers of cultural appropriation, gentrification, paternalism and other harmful missional practices. There are also significant apprehensions about the inherent physical, emotional, and spiritual risks for missionaries living in dangerous areas. Advocates of incarnational ministry argue that these issues can be addressed by focusing on union with Christ instead of the imitation of Christ, which leads to an understanding of holiness and hospitality as participation in the life and mission of God. When incarnational ministry is thus properly contextualised, it is consistent with The Salvation Army's theology, ethics, and history, and can be a powerfully effective approach to Salvation Army mission.

The doctrine of Christ's incarnation rests upon the idea that "in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that he is truly and properly God, and truly and properly man."¹⁵ He was sent into the world by the Father, and later prayed to the Father: "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world," (John 17:18). Advocates of incarnational ministry see this as a commission for the Church to model mission after the incarnation of Christ. This means that believers should imitate the love that entered the world through Christ to reach those "caught in the snares of non-love and seduced by injustice, deceit and violence."¹⁶ The ecclesial, missional, and ethical activity of Christians should, in this view, be patterned after Jesus' humility, self-sacrifice, and complete identification with humanity. Just as Christ took on the flesh and experiences of humanity, so too should the Church take on the cultural, political, and socio-economical experiences and concerns of the communities where they minister, particularly amongst the poor and suffering. Jesus embodied all the pain, temptation, sorrow, and conflict of humanity, and this should characterise the way the Church embraces and encounters men and women today.¹⁷ Incarnational ministers often highlight the importance of relocating to the abandoned places of world as the first step towards modeling after Christ's ministry. Abandoned places are defined as locations that have "no attraction for the 'world of what's happening now,' and [are]

¹⁵ *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, (London: Salvation Books, 2010), 320.

¹⁶ Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14.3 (1998): 415.

¹⁷ Kathryn Tanner, "Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal," *Anglican Theological Review* Vol 86:1, (Winter 2004): 46.

therefore left alone by the political, economic and social powers that be.”¹⁸ The act of relocation “expresses conversion and commitment, the decision to resist imperial pressures and the pleasures and rewards of conformity to the way of all empires: pride, power, and reduction of all values to the ‘bottom line.’”¹⁹ The incarnational Church is to imitate Jesus in his rejection of the glory of this world, in his acceptance of self-denial, and in his “divine labor of love’s suffering and risk.”²⁰

The Salvation Army, in its inception, endeavoured to put this suffering, risky, incarnational love into practice in many “abandoned places”. William Booth was not interested in disembodied and disengaged Bible scholarship, but rather wanted to translate Scripture “into the hearts and conduct of living men and women,” as he believed “it is of no use making correct translations of words if we cannot get the *words translated into life*.”²¹ The innovation of The Salvation Army was this “marriage of belief and action, the holistic union of spiritual and social concern incarnated in the slums, the pubs, the mines, the street corners, and under the bridges.”²² Once Salvationists had the message of the Bible imprinted upon their hearts, William Booth’s next advice for cross-cultural missionaries, officers and soldiers was to “Get into their skins!”²³ The idea was to enter as fully as possible into the culture and conditions of the people one served, in imitation of Christ’s incarnation for humanity. One notable example of this incarnational effort is Frederick Booth-Tucker, an English Salvationist who moved to India, changed his name to Fakir Singh, adopted Indian dress, and conducted his ministry barefoot and begging for food. His efforts captured the imagination of Salvationists around the world, to the point where he had to set the following conditions for anyone who wished to join him:

Service will be a matter not merely of being willing to go anywhere, but of wishing to live and die for the particular race to which you are sent. You will be absolutely alone and under close scrutiny. It will be essential to learn at least one Indian language. You must leave entirely and forever behind you all your English dress and habits. Officers will be barefoot. You will avoid the English quarter, but will always live among natives – sometimes in a cave, a shady tree, or someone's veranda – or in a mud hut 16 by 10 feet. You will cook as they do, and wash your clothes in the stream with them. You have nothing to fear from the climate. The people are different and intensely religious. Find out what their thoughts are before you share yours. And if you are planning to return,

¹⁸ Sr. Margaret M. McKenna, “Mark 1: Relocation to Abandoned Places of Empire,” in *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, ed. The Rutba House, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2005), 15.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Volf, “Trinity,” 413.

²¹ William Booth, cited in Roger J. Green, “A Permanent Mission to the ‘Whosever’: William Booth’s Theology of Redemption,” in *Saved, Sanctified and Serving: Perspectives on Salvation Army Theology and Practice*, ed. Denis Metruster, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), 55.

²² Aaron White, “Warriors in the Salvation War: Who are these Primitive Salvationists?” in *Saved, Sanctified and Serving: Perspectives on Salvation Army Theology and Practice*, ed. Denis Metruster, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), 203.

²³ Paul Rader, “Intercultural Ministry: The Army Perspective,” in *Vision Splendid: Intercultural Mission and The Salvation Army*, ed. Mal Davies, (Wellington, NZ: Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory, Australia Southern Territory, and New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory, nd), 33.

don't go. We would not think of sending anyone out who did not plan to make it a life work.²⁴

Incarnation also became a staple of The Salvation Army's slum ministry: "No Salvation Army slum post could do its work...either from the pedestal of patronage or without the sympathy bred by a personal twenty-four-hours-a-day experience of slum life."²⁵ The Salvation Army's continual presence in the slums helped it to understand the complex problems besetting the people living there. Regular house-to-house visitation in East London, Salvationists reported, "brought to light an amount of vice and misery that we could not have conceived of."²⁶ By 1889, sixty British Salvation Army officers had responded to the call to move into the slums to minister, and the program later expanded to America under the name "The Garret, Dive and Tenement Brigade." There, the War Cry reported, "in the midst of the squalor, misery and sin of one of the worst neighbourhoods of the great city of New York...two officers are commencing the Saviour-like work of visiting, helping, and reclaiming the lost," by moving into the neighbourhood.²⁷ Most of the officers who made such a move were women, leading to the nickname "Slum Sisters" or "Slum Angels." These officers regularly scheduled three hours a day for visitation, sometimes managing thirty visits a day per officer, and focused on meeting practical needs, minding children while parents worked, praying with families, and witnessing through Bible studies and preaching.²⁸ It was believed that the Army in the 1890's "had an almost unequalled knowledge of the conditions and needs of the lower classes" because of its "officers' identification with the masses in terms of origin and aim as well as continuing residence."²⁹ Officers living and working "just where slum conditions are at their most difficult" provided the Army with both insight and motivation, and led to the conclusion that "the problem of the slums can effectively be grappled with only from the inside."³⁰ The slum brigades were a deeply practical response to the desperate urban poverty of the late 19th century, but they also involved theological reflection, as evidenced in the statement offered by one high-ranking officer: "God had one son, and He was a slummer."³¹

God's son may have been a "slummer", but that does not mean anyone can or should attempt to copy him. A theological danger of an incarnational model for ministry is the temptation to minimize the vast gulf between God and his creation that could only be bridged by Jesus himself. Christ's incarnation was unique and unrepeatable, leading some theologians to reject the idea that it could ever be a model for Christians to copy.³² The best that we can do is point to Christ's incarnation as a saving event,

24 St. John G. Ervine, *God's Soldier*, Volume I, (London: The MacMillan Company, 1935), 576.

25 Hugh Redwood, *God in the Slums*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), 27.

26 Catherine Booth, cited in Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920*, (Grand Rapids: Baker House Books, 1977), 31.

27 Redwood, *God in the Slums*, 35.

28 *Ibid.*

29 Magnuson, *Salvation*, 32.

30 Redwood, *God in the Slums*, 26.

31 *Ibid.*, 35.

32 J. Todd Billings, *Union With Christ: Reframing Theolog and Ministry for the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 124.

something that God did for us, and not something we can or should try to replicate. It is also debatable whether it is feasible or appropriate for Christians to attempt incarnational ministry by means of cultural identification.³³ However noble the intentions, Christians cannot fully take on the flesh of another culture in the same way that Jesus assumed humanity, and there are serious ethical dangers involved in trying to do so. Billings notes that “missionaries can find it impossible, practically speaking, to become ‘one’ with the people they are ministering to.”³⁴ General Shaw Clifton illustrates this difficulty in his discussion of cultural differences throughout The Salvation Army world. Issues ranging from abortion, pre-marital sex, and bribery, to men holding hands in public or a Western husband allowing his wife to walk ahead of him in the bazaar are all culturally-conditioned to such a degree that the best a foreign missionary might hope to do is “behave well”.³⁵ Even the most ardent supporter of incarnational ministry would likely not advocate injecting drugs in order to “get into the skin” of an addict, nor committing heinous crimes in order to authentically share the experiences of a convict.

This boundary stands in some tension with William Booth’s original instructions to his officers on the matter of incarnating into other cultures: “I say to my officer who is going to Holland: ‘Can you be a Dutchman?’ To the man who is going to Zululand: ‘Can you be a Zulu?’ To the one going to India: ‘Can you be an Indian?’ If you cannot, you must not go at all.”³⁶ Booth’s call to “get into their skins” might now be perceived as a form of cultural appropriation, which involves the use or adoption of another culture for one’s own purposes. This typically occurs when a dominant culture attempts to copy the dress, habits, language and customs of a minority culture. Frederick Booth-Tucker could be suspected of cultural assimilation when he, an Englishman, adopted dress, customs and name from the Indian sub-continent where he was sent to minister. It is reasonable to question how genuine and complete this cultural incarnation could have been from the perspective of the local Indians, irrespective of Booth-Tucker’s noble and sacrificial intent. It is highly unlikely that a Salvationist from India could have “incarnated” into English society in the same way, given the difference in power dynamics between the two cultures. Though the purpose of incarnation may be evangelism and identification, the result could be an unintentional reinforcing of cultural imperialism. Incarnational ministry could be characterised as the preserve of the privileged as they relinquish position and power to communicate with cultures that are socially and economically less dominant. This same critique could be leveled at the “Slum Sisters”, and it is likewise legitimate to question how deeply these missionaries could identify with families living in generational poverty and oppression, unless they themselves came from that socio-economic background. No amount of study and effort can reproduce lifetimes or generations of cultural experience, and suggesting that one can fully adopt another person’s worldview, history, hope and suffering risks belittling the host culture, or reducing it to leverage in evangelistic efforts. Additionally, one may ask if the host cultures have any option to resist this incarnation and assimilation, or if they are required to be passive recipients of this downwards social movement.

33 Ibid., 13-14, 160.

34 Ibid., 125.

35 Shaw Clifton, *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 2000-2010*, (London: Salvation Books, 2010), 9-13.

36 William Booth, cited in White, “Who are these Primitive Salvationists?” 207.

Gentrification and paternalism are two other potentially harmful consequences of incarnational ministry. There has recently been a surge of interest in young, missional Christians moving back into the city, and much accompanying work has been done by theologians and pastors to develop incarnational urban theologies. These theologies tend to “talk a lot about moving in and contributing to the flourishing of a city, but say little on the negative disruption that these moves can make in the existing community.”³⁷ New Christian missions and Church plants can make huge impacts – and not always positive - on existing Church-life, neighbourhood dynamics, the price of housing, and the types of businesses that flourish. Read notes that even when there is a positive desire to bring transformation to an environment, “so many schemes of social reform patronize and objectify or pity the objects of their reform-mindedness; they reduce human beings to statistics, and predicate the value of their interventions on a demonstration of their efficiency.”³⁸ Incarnational church plants may begin with the desire to get into the skin of the neighbourhood, but they often default into an attempt to bring the neighbourhood up to the societal standards with which they are comfortable.³⁹ This is damaging to the social fabric of a neighbourhood, and can lead to socio-economic displacement of families and residents who have been there for generations. This approach may even undermine the already existing local Church expression, as “the unspoken assumption in the books, sermons, and conferences targeting missional-minded evangelicals is that the city—prior to white, hip church planters—is a foreign mission field, pristine and untouched by the work of the Lord.”⁴⁰ Nate J. Lee explains, any kind of language that implies that God’s work or God’s plan *starts* when *we* arrive ... is indicative not only of terrible theology, but of white Christian exceptionalism, the oppressive belief that the correct kind salvation and healing can only be facilitated through *us*, on *our* terms with *our* methods—and *us* always happens to be white missionaries, white pastors, and white churches.⁴¹

Finally, in addition to the concerns around cultural assimilation, gentrification, and paternalism, incarnational ministry exposes missionaries to certain physical, emotional and spiritual dangers. Jesus warns his disciples against being of the world even while they are in it (John 17:14-15) and James advises that true religion includes keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:26-27). One of the dangers of incarnational ministry is becoming so focused on adopting the host culture that you fail to see aspects within it that must be challenged by the Gospel. This can lead to compromise or syncretism. When Jesus took on human flesh he perfectly identify and communed with us, but he also overcame sin and brought us to redemption.⁴² The humanity that Jesus

37 D.L. Mayfield, “Church Planting and the Gospel of Gentrification: Are we seeking the ‘welfare of the city,’ or just our own?” Sojourners, July 2017, <https://sojo.net/magazine/july-2017/church-planting-and-gospel-gentrification>.

38 James E. Read, “Social-Political Holiness in the World,” Word & Deed 13, no. 2 (May 2011): 30.

39 Mayfield, “Church Planting,”.

40 Ibid.

41 Nate J. Lee, cited in Ibid.

42 J. Todd Billings, “‘Incarnational Ministry’ and Christology: A Reappropriation of the Way of Lowliness,” Missiology: An International Review 32:2, (April 2004), <http://jtoddbillings.com/2004/04/incarnational-ministry-and-christology-a-reappropriation-of-the-way-of-lowliness/>, accessed July 8, 2017.

assumed was “suffering from fear and distress, conflict with others, anxiety before death, betrayal and isolation, separation from God—all the qualities of death-infused, sin-corrupted life that require remedy,” but he did not surrender his holiness in the face of this challenge.⁴³ Human ministers may not be capable of such resiliency. These qualities of suffering and oppressive humanity, so dangerous to the spiritual life of the incarnational minister, are also dangerous to the emotional and physical life of incarnational minister. Eliza Shirley and another young female officer were tasked in 1879 to lead a Corps in Bishop Auckland, and after moving into the neighbourhood were faced with regular verbal and physical threats, and had to survive by eating the food that was thrown at them during open-air meetings.⁴⁴ Missionaries who cross cultures or who move into impoverished urban environments are often subject to higher levels of loneliness, emotional hardship, and physical hazards, and these dangers extend to their children as well. For these reasons, it could be considered unethical to subject Salvation Army officers, soldiers, and families to the extra difficulties of incarnational ministry.

For incarnational ministry to be considered theologically meaningful and ethically responsible, these various critiques must be addressed. Though Christ’s unique incarnation is not an action that can be copied or repeated by the Church, the union between Christ and his Church can still serve as the basis for incarnational ministry. 2 Peter 1:4 claims that believers can “become partakers of the divine nature,” an idea that inspired Orthodox theologians to depict salvation as the “transformation of believers into the likeness of God.”⁴⁵ Protestants tend to be nervous about all the implications of this theology, but have developed similar concepts in their exploration of holiness and entire sanctification. John Wesley argued that in Christ we share “all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked,” and can know “a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, enabling us to walk in the full likeness of Him that created it.”⁴⁶ This is the experience that General William Booth describes as being “saved to the uttermost! Saved now and every day!” and that results in “the condition of the perpetual indwelling of God,” which is essential for a sustained holy life and ministry.⁴⁷ In the same spirit, General Clifton describes holiness as the process by which believers are “changed into Christ’s person.”⁴⁸ All humans, he avers, are made in “the image of God...to which we owe all honour and love,” but this applies particularly to Christians “because in them that image of God, marred and distorted by the Fall, has been renewed and restored by the Spirit of Christ.”⁴⁹ The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine states that “by His incarnation and atonement Jesus so identified Himself with

43 Tanner, “Incarnation,” 46.

44 Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army, Vol 2 1878-1886* (London: Nelson, 1966), 6.

45 Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 1.

46 Charles W. Carter, ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic and Practical, Vol 1*, (Grand Rapids: Asbury Press, 1983), 350.

47 William Booth, cited in Andrew M. Eason, and Roger J. Green, eds. “Holiness,” in *Boundless Salvation: The Shorter Writings of William Booth*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 86-87.

48 Clifton, *Selected Writings: Volume 2*, 127.

49 Shaw Clifton, *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1974-1999*, (London: Salvation Books, 2010), 44.

men [sic] that He is one with those who receive his saving grace,”⁵⁰ and that the life of holiness means “becoming like Christ who is the true image of God...Holiness is Christlikeness.”⁵¹ If Christians can live in this restored likeness of Christ, having been changed into the very person of Christ through the uniting of humanity and divinity in his own flesh, then incarnational ministry may be seen as a divinely-mandated participation in the life of Christ, rather than a human-initiated attempt to copy the actions of Christ. As Yoder puts it, in Christ “we find an utterly precise and practicable ethical instruction, practicable because in him the kingdom has actually come within reach. In him the sovereignty of Jahweh has become human history.”⁵² This takes the onus off the ability of Christians to imitate Christ, and places it on Christ’s real and active presence in the midst of his people. The Church, of which The Salvation Army is a part, can be likened to a sacrament of Christ, a physical manifestation of the “real, eschatologically triumphant and irrevocably established presence of Christ in the world.”⁵³ Volf declares that the one who went to the cross in the power of the Spirit, now dispenses the same Spirit to empower his followers to participate in the downward movement of God’s love which forgives sins and creates a community of joy in the midst of suffering (John 20:19-23).⁵⁴

This means that as the Church makes itself present in the pain, poverty and suffering of the world, it is appropriate to say that Christ is present with his message of temporal and eternal salvation. This is the work of Christ, the *Missio Dei*, in which the people of God participate but do not seek to imitate or initiate.

For William Booth, Jesus was an example of how to live, but even more so he was the saviour who empowered his people to live. Though Booth increased his emphasis upon social work in the model of Jesus’ incarnation, he never allowed “Christ as teacher of ethics, as a model for men [sic],” to replace “Christ as the way toward salvation.”⁵⁵ In this Booth managed to combine “the theology of the Atonement with the social conscience of the Incarnation.”⁵⁶ It is therefore in and through Christ’s salvation and self-giving incarnation into the world that The Salvation Army may genuinely engage in incarnational ministry. God cannot be fully grasped, and neither can the painful and conflicted reality of world, but both may be fully engaged from within, through the incarnate person of Jesus.⁵⁷ That is, Jesus invites his people both into the life of the Trinity, and into the life of the broken world, because he knows both those realities firsthand. This means that The Salvation Army should seek to find God through prayer, worship, community, and devotion to the word, but also in the daily suffering and hope

50 Handbook of Doctrine, (London: International Headquarters, 1969), 132.

51 The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine, 192-193.

52 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 107.

53 Karl Rahner, cited in Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 474.

54 Volf, “Trinity,” 418-419.

55 Ann M. Woodall, “What Price the Poor: William Booth, Karl Marx, and the London Residuum,” *The Economic History Review*, Vol 59 Issue 4, (November 2006): 853-854.

56 Ibid.

57 Kilby, “Trinity,” 82-86.

of human existence, an incarnational attitude that helps The Salvation Army resist the temptations towards dualism that beset the Church. It does this by emphasising God's care for the physical and relational as well as the spiritual, which is a hallmark of The Salvation Army's commitment to social holiness. Read highlights this commitment as a fundamental motivation for the socio-political scheme laid out in "The Darkest England Scheme", and advances it as justification for adopting a rights-based discourse that treats human beings as if their whole lives, and not just their immortal souls, actually matter.⁵⁸ Phil Needham likewise asserts that "while God was fully incarnate in Jesus Christ, he is also incarnate today. The ministry of health, healing and wholeness is a ministry 'conducted in his name, in his power, by following his example, and by recognizing that ... [our] work is in his presence'."⁵⁹ This agrees with The Salvation Army's anti-dualistic doctrines ten and eleven, which state that "it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," and that in addition to the immortality of the soul, The Salvation Army believes in "the resurrection of the body."⁶⁰ Incarnational ministry, properly pursued, embodies this belief in God's concern for the whole human being, and all of human relationships.

It is this holistic pursuit of God in every sphere of life that can safeguard the Salvationist against syncretism, compromise, and the loss of spiritual vitality while still living in the world. The early Salvation Army understood the importance of prayer and worship, but they also knew that "the wonder-working presence of a real and loving God is to be found 'not far from every one of us,' but, beyond all question, in the slums."⁶¹ If true union with Christ is the foundation of incarnational ministry, there should be no fear of being contaminated through immersion in the impure and sinful world; rather, "there is every reason to bring the sinful, the death-ridden, the impure, into direct contact with the holy: that is the very means of their sanctification."⁶² Christ himself demonstrated this when he touched the bleeding woman (Luke 8:43-48) and the leprous man (Matthew 8:1-3). According the Law and custom, this contact should have made Jesus unclean, but his holiness was such that his cleanness infected those who were unclean, and not the other way around. If Salvationists are united with Christ; participating in his life; obedient to his direction; filled with his holiness; and empowered by his Spirit, then this should be our expectation as well. In this way, Salvationists can live out a sacramental life of holiness. The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine states: "Christ is the one true Sacrament, and sacramental living – Christ living in us and through us – is at the heart of Christian holiness and discipleship."⁶³ Needham expands on this, saying that "all of life is a sacrament of grace, a celebration of grace in the everyday...the Christian is to live his [sic] holiness in the world, avoid the dualism of sacred and secular, and seek the

58 Read, "Socio-Political Holiness," 21, 28.

59 Phil D. Needham, "The Theology: The Healing Gospel," in *Health, Healing and Wholeness: Salvationist Perspectives*, ed. Graham Calvert, (London: Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1997), 30-31.

60 The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine, 320.

61 Redwood, *God in the Slums*, 19.

62 Tanner, "Incarnation," 55.

63 The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine, 300.

presence and grace of God everywhere.”⁶⁴ It is in this way, Needham states, that “the Lord’s table was moved from the sanctuary to the streets.”⁶⁵

It is by linking this theology of sacramental holiness to the ancient Christian practice of giving and receiving hospitality that the obstacles of assimilation, gentrification, paternalism, and fear of danger can truly be overcome. Christ’s instructions to his missionaries in Luke 10:1-23 was not to begin by preaching, by enacting a justice project, or even by offering hospitality, but by *receiving* hospitality. Just as the incarnate Jesus was received into the world, in some cases with welcome, in other cases with hostility, Jesus’ followers are to experience the welcome or hostility of the world as they carry the presence of Jesus into cities, towns, neighbourhoods, and cultures. When Salvationists are welcomed by people of peace they are truly engaging in the work of incarnational evangelism, because Jesus promises that “the one who hears you hears me,” (Luke 23:16a). The posture of relying upon the hospitality of one’s neighbours requires humility, self-emptying, vulnerability, and gratitude. It is the opposite of the privileged and paternalistic approach which assumes that God is just waiting for us to arrive before he begins to work in a culture. It means that Salvationists must accept the welcome that is offered by the host culture, and not the welcome they might find most comfortable (Luke 10:7). It does not automatically seek to alter the socio-economic relationships of a neighbourhood or culture, but begins by participating in these relationships, at the lowest possible level, and causing the least amount of disruption. This helps to guard against the dangers of gentrification. All of this puts our neighbours into the enviable position of being “sheep” who, even unknowingly, welcome Jesus as they offer hospitality to us, the least of Jesus’ brothers and sisters (Matthew 25:31-46). This approach also allows for the possibility of rejection. When Salvationists face the rejection of the world, they experience the rejection Christ faced from his own: “the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me,” (Luke 23:16b). Incarnational presence must not be forced on a culture or community, and Jesus instructs his followers to either find people of peace, or to shake the dust off their feet. If there are aspects of the culture that need to be challenged by the Gospel, this should begin from within the household and by the authority of those who already know and embody the culture, and who have accepted and applied the message of Jesus in their own lives. Applying these principles to the example of Booth-Tucker, although he could never truly become Indian, he did display a Christ-like humility, a desire to listen and learn from the culture, and a commitment to share the Gospel from a lowly posture. He participated socio-economically at the lowest level available to him, and he attempted first to receive hospitality rather than making assumptions and immediately working for societal change. The power dynamics inherent in British colonial imperialism, as well as the natural obstacles of human finitude and sin, necessarily limited his ability to incarnate. Nevertheless, the spirit with which Booth-

64 Philip D. Needham, “My life must be Christ’s broken bread,’: Non-practice of the Sacraments in The Salvation Army: Re-considering the Decision 130 Years Later,” in *Saved, Sanctified and Serving: Perspectives on Salvation Army Theology and Practice*, ed. Denis Mestrutery, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), 137.

65 Ibid.

Tucker approached cross-cultural, incarnational mission is a worthy model for Salvationists to study today.

Once the Salvationist has learned to receive hospitality, he or she can practice extending hospitality to others, and in so doing can learn to encounter Christ in a new way. Christine Pohl declares that when we open up our home, our space, our lives to others, we discover that “Jesus, the most desired guest, comes in the form of the vulnerable stranger. The possibility that hosts are welcoming Jesus can overcome resistance and fear.”⁶⁶ There is a great suspicion of neighbour in our world today, which is one of the reasons Salvation Army officers and soldiers are often taught to stringently separate their “home” life from their “ministry” life. The practice of hospitality, however, allows the Salvationist to find Christ in unexpected places. As Dr. Aimee Patterson puts it, the virtue of hospitality requires getting to know the stranger, learning how they think of themselves and their needs, and decreasing the “distance between host and guest.”⁶⁷ As the host’s understanding of the Gospel is enriched by the perspective of the guest, it could be said that “the guest becomes the host...the stranger becomes the neighbour...and the neighbour becomes Christ.”⁶⁸ This takes seriously the notion that Christ is present in the guise of the stranger - particularly in the company of the poor - and recognises that the Lord’s Table is found wherever the people of God encounter the presence of Christ in the world.

Our experience of receiving and giving hospitality as an incarnational Salvation Army community in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside bears out this sacramental belief. Fully getting into the skin of people with vastly different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds is beyond us. However, we can be part of forming a community where a wide variety of people and cultures inform one another, offer hospitality to one another, and commit to worshipping the Lord and praying together. As we gather in homes, cafes, treatment centres, and community halls, we witness the Spirit of God drawing people together from every tribe, nation, tongue and background of our neighbourhood. We believe that in this we are being united to God through Christ, and to one another in the Spirit of Christ. Being welcomed into the homes of our neighbours is an act of evangelism, because we know that as they invite us in they are also in a real way inviting Christ. Welcoming our neighbours into our homes and lives is likewise an act of welcoming the image of God into our midst, and sharing God’s good gifts with one another. There is no ministry scenario where the safety of the ministers or their families can be guaranteed, but getting to know our neighbours well has significantly increased our sense of safety and community, and helps us to overcome the isolation that many people experience in our atomistic Western society. People in our neighbourhood are very protective over our children, and often warn us when dangerous situations are about to occur. We accept, however, that there will be some level of danger around us, because that is the daily reality of our neighbours, and we believe that Christians –

66 Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 97.

67 Aimee Patterson, “Lecture Week 9: Internationalism and Multiculturalism,” (Salvation Army and Ethical Issues, Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, Summer 2017), 23.

68 *Ibid.*

Salvationists in particular – should be present for people in their moments of crisis. This allows us to truly rejoice when our neighbours rejoice, to mourn when they mourn, and to stand alongside them, lending our voices to theirs as they fight for justice and dignity, because we are in some measure experiencing the triumphs and struggles of the neighbourhood first hand. In all of this, we believe that we are not so much imitating Christ as being brought up into the life of God, and brought down into the life of the world, in and through Christ's incarnation. The result is that The Salvation Army in the Downtown Eastside is not simply known as a good social service provider or Church, but as neighbours who try to live out the Gospel in the daily life, joy and pain of the community.

When the focus of incarnational ministry is on receiving and giving hospitality instead of initiating programs; listening to neighbours instead of telling them what you think; and looking for where God is already present instead of assuming that you are beginning the work of the Kingdom; then concerns around cultural assimilation, paternalism, gentrification, and safety risks are significantly mitigated, though they are never entirely resolved. This allows The Salvation Army to partner with the people of peace in a neighbourhood, rather than pursuing its own agenda. This posture helps The Salvation Army to genuinely recognise the dignity of its neighbours, which is consistent with its belief that each person, made in the image of God, possesses "inherent dignity, and that each life is a gift from God to be cherished, nurtured and redeemed."⁶⁹ These sacred lives were created by God "for relationships and for those relationships to be expressed living in community."⁷⁰ Read reminds us that although every human being is in need of the redeeming and transforming work of Christ in their lives, our ministry and mission should also be motivated by "the simple, utter sacredness of each and every human being," that should "make us stand in awe."⁷¹ This posture of awe, love, respect and relational community can be powerfully engendered by a proper understanding of incarnational ministry, which comes about through the union and identification of Christ with his children. Incarnational ministry, which stands faithfully within The Salvation Army's history and theology, can help position The Salvation Army to receive the Spirit's guidance in behaving well within various cultures, and in translating supra-cultural truths so that "the gospel of new life in Jesus is constantly being renewed and made universally meaningful for all persons in all cultures in all periods of history."⁷²

69 The Salvation Army International Positional Statement: "Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide," 2.

70 Ibid.

71 Read, "Socio-Political Holiness," 30.

72 Clifton, *Selected Writings: Volume 2*, 15.

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Message from Mark 1:4-11 page

Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield

**editor's note: These are preaching notes, not academic essay papers, and so may lack a reference here or there (indeed, they were prepared for preaching and not for wider readership). It is not the intent to withhold credit from a source.*

Once torn, things will never be quite the same

Yesterday I was talking with friends about vacationing in Cuba. It seems the right topic with the weather we are having. I was speaking to one family who shared that even today there is still control of information. One example is that the government does not want tourists to stay with locals. We are bussed to all-inclusive resorts which can only be accessed by the locals who work there. Even as you tour town you will notice a beautiful site, well kept, but if you look just behind, the houses are not so nice.

But then the moment this family landed back, the messaging bombarded them, screens all over, invest here, eat this, dress, have...

We think we are free but the truth is that regardless of where we live we have to intentionally *decide to whom am I going to give my allegiance*. If we are not intentional, the subtle or not so subtle messaging will do the job for us, and we will consume what we are being told to consume.

So we, as God's people protect our identity and our freedom by coming to Church, by reading His Word, by continually seeking to align our life to the principles taught in the Bible.

Setting

We are in the Gospel of Mark, not too frequently read during Advent or Christmas because he makes no reference to Jesus birth, angels, guiding stars, Bethlehem, shepherds or wise men. He informs his readers then and now of the mind-blowing truth of the incarnation in two short sentences:

He (Jesus) saw heaven torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from Heaven: You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased. Mark 1:10-11

That's it, succinct. The life altering, history altering event of the incarnation in two short sentences. We read it so fast that it is easy to miss the magnitude of what is being communicated.

There are two expressions to which I want to call your attention. One is "You are my Son", the other is the word "torn," "torn open".

Jesus – the Son of God

Mark begins his Gospel stating: **The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** (Mark 1:1) No need to guess who Jesus is.

I did a search for references to Son of God within the book of Mark and found that Mark begins by telling us of the divine acknowledgement (Mark 1:10-11), God the Father speaks, God the Spirit descends, God the Son is affirmed.

The next time we find the expression used is when Jesus is recognized by spirits – Mark includes two occasions when Jesus was helping people possessed by evil spirits and the spirits saw exactly who was addressing them: (3:11) **whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.”** (also Mark 5:7)

It dawns on man

And then at the most unexpected place, the oddest moment, the truth dawns on man, a man with no Jewish background, a man who had seen Jesus mocked, tormented, rejected and now dying. He sees Jesus for who He truly is: **Surely this man was the Son of God!** (Mark 15:39) I don't know if the Centurion realized the significance of his declaration, but Mark - when he was told of this detail - saw it as the climax of the good news about Jesus, from God's own declaration, to a man's realization, and a foreigner at that.

This takes even further significance when we notice another word used both in the account of Jesus' baptism as well as in his dying moments.

And that is the word **torn**

Torn open. In Greek it is the word *schitzo* as in schism. “Torn open” has a different connotation than simply saying “opened”. Once something is torn, it is never quite the same. In the other Gospels it is used for example to describe the old cloth that tears when patched with new cloth, in Corinthians when urging Christians to get along that there may be no division, no tearing. So it is not an obscure word.

Luke and John in their description of the events speak of heaven opening. Mark chooses this word *torn, torn open* to imply that something happened beyond the awesome yet straightforward affirmation of Jesus' identity.

Think about it. This is Mark's incarnation narrative – “the rending of the heavens by the Father is a declaration that the One on whom the Spirit rests is the Son out of Heaven. The Son of God has pierced the barrier between heaven and earth. In Mark's Gospel the incarnation of the Son of God is declared by the revelation that happened at this moment. The rending, the voice, the dove all announce that now the Kingdom of God is at hand, now from this moment at the Jordan, the kingdom of God has come; now the beginning of new things – a new beginning in the history of redemption with the advent – the coming of the Son of God.”⁷³

⁷³ <http://www.kerux.com/doc/0903A1.asp>

It was Isaiah who cried out in prayer: **O that you would tear the heavens open and come down to make your name known to your enemies and make the nations tremble at your presence.** (Isaiah 64:1) Now if you think of that day by the Jordan, the nations were not trembling when God the Son began to walk among us, no one else may have noticed but this does not mean that things were the same. Something had changed profoundly.

“Moses walked down to the red sea and the waters parted, Joshua came to the Jordan and the waters parted, Elijah struck the water too, but when Jesus went down to the Jordan the very heavens were parted. There is something new and greater here.⁷⁴

Torn places never close as neatly as before again. Nothing would ever be the same.

What was torn, never to be the same?

In this event in particular we see that:

Jesus changed the concept of God – He reveals himself to us as God who humbles himself, God being willing to identify so completely with us. God with us in a way He has not been before.

Jesus changed the concept of Messiah. (What is your concept of Messiah, of the one who comes to rescue us, a Liberator, many women were brought up with the concept of a Prince Charming who will ride in on a white horse and make all well... who do men dream of? Who would be your liberator) Jesus changes the concept, He is the one who comes to liberate us from ourselves first and foremost, who comes to give us the Holy Spirit. Not a Napoleonic force imposing his rule, but the Power from within. The meaning of the word for Spirit is breath. The indwelling Breath of God...

And the tearing continued throughout His ministry. He tore the concept of poor as a personal failure, of the ill as failures (remember when the disciples so callously asked, who sinned them or their parents?)

Jesus tore the basis for determining the value of a human being. We see it in the way He treated women, foreigners, children, elderly, sick, the outcast showing the intrinsic value of each person regardless of race, age, gender, nationality.

Most of all Jesus changed our possibilities so that we could be free, holy people, He tore our bond from victims to people with choices, real choices.

Jesus tore the separation between heaven and earth, creating the possibility of relationship, real relationship not just as created and their Creator, but as family, friends.

We need to hold on to these concepts/assumptions that Jesus tore because we keep being pulled back to the old way of thinking/valuing things.

⁷⁴ <https://www.onemansweb.org/theology/the-year-of-mark-2015/fake-tan-mark-1-4-11.html>

There are only two places in the Gospel of Mark where he uses the word torn (schitzo). In the oddest place we hear the same words again. In describing the death of Jesus Mark tell us “**The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom** (Mark 15:38). In the very next sentence he tells us about the centurion, standing at the foot of the cross, a Roman official waiting to pronounce him dead, who somehow as he witnessed Jesus taking his last breath said the same words Jesus had heard at the Jordan, truly this man was God’s Son.

What does this mean for us?

If you think of the two moments which Mark joins in our minds by the use of the same terminology, they are moments of full surrender. At the Jordan, surrendering His life for ministry, at the cross the ultimate surrender - His life for our life. These two dyings, unexpectedly in our mind, become moments of transparency, moments when His true identity come shining through.

It is baffling but even being God the Son, it was His willingness to surrender it all for us that tore open the heavens. You and I have life and hope because of Jesus’ surrender.

Ephesians 3 tells us that **God’s intent is that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.** Ephesians 3:10

How do we make this known? Following the example of Jesus.

Many here have surrendered their lives by entering into a covenant with God as soldiers Together we read the doctrines at the beginning of the meeting, when you go home review your commitment.

What does it look like? Surrendering is not a matter of a moment, but a daily practice, it is intentionally living each day following God’s guidance.

Later on today I will send you an e-mail with various tools available as you seek to be intentional about your surrender.

I am using Infinitum as a rule of life.

For some it may mean that before turning on your technology making sure you have your quiet time with God, reading the Bible, meditating on, surrendering your day to Him.

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Message from Matthew 25:1-13

Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield

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How many here had their snow scrapers in the car on Friday? It's not like we had not been forewarned that we would have snow and freezing weather, still Friday morning came, the windshield wipers were stuck to the windshield and no brush or scrapers in the car! Am I the only one? I should have been prepared.

Last week I met a Funeral Director who is also a volunteer firefighter. They are not only on call when an emergency happens, they also have to do many hours of training, always to be on top shape, sharp on the techniques for that moment the call comes. When they are called to duty is too late to review or train.

What does preparedness look like? This is the question Jesus wants his disciples to think about, though it is not the question the disciples were asking. They wanted to know when the end would come, when would the Kingdom be realized in all its fullness.

Jesus tells them a story, it would have sounded so common to them at a time when wedding proceedings could last days, at a time estimated time of arrival was not aided by our means of communication.

We just heard the story. Jesus said, **at that time**, the term would refer to when – in biblical terms - **the Son of Man comes in all His glory**, that time when things finally are as they should be, harmony, creativity, no impediment to be all we were meant to be, and our faith realized, being in the very presence of Jesus, seeing Him in the fullness of His glory... How would you define the kingdom? Jesus said, **at that time**, the kingdom of heaven will be like the story of the 10 virgins.

Ten young women waiting. The wait is longer than expected. They fall asleep. They are startled by the announcement: "He's coming"; and that is when the difference between them becomes tragically evident and five of them are left out. It's too late. The celebration begins and they are not part of it.

The danger with allegories is that we try to find meaning for everything. We need to look at what the Bible tells us, let the Bible interpret the Bible. What was the point Jesus tells us He was making.

Let's review the context. The disciples and the crowd had been hearing Jesus speaking about the Kingdom coming, the expectation was growing, tell us when, is it now? Starting in Matthew 24:42 Jesus tells them/warns them it will be unexpected; in 24:45-51 Jesus tells them that it is not enough to know this, that more than passive watchfulness is required, there must be behavior acceptable to the Master, the

discharge of allotted responsibilities (you have been enabled, equipped, resourced to have an impact for good, do it!). And in the parable for today Jesus stresses the need for preparedness in the face of unexpected long delay.

The overriding theme is preparedness for the coming of the Son of Man. In other words, the Kingdom of God is as much about our relationship with Him now as well as the great expectation of what is to come. How would you describe your relationship with Jesus right now?

The plot turns on the bridegroom's delay. It is the bridegroom's delay that distinguishes the wise from the foolish virgins. The oil is merely an element in the narrative showing that the foolish virgins were unprepared for the delay and so shut out in the end.

I wonder if Jesus was thinking about the nation of Israel, even as He was addressing matters in a much wider scale. The people listening to Jesus, they were the chosen people of God to be a light to the world. Their history was a preparation for the coming of the Messiah, we see that throughout the Old Testament. They should have been prepared for His coming. But, the opposite happened. Think about it, a nation built on the expectation of the One to come, though they were "waiting" they were not prepared for His coming, and through their rejection of Him, found themselves excluded.

Before we judge too harshly, we recall Jesus' words to those who chose to follow Him: **you, you are the light of the world**. If you have decided to follow Jesus, you are the people of God chosen to be a light to the world. This message was as much for them as it is for you and me today. Jesus is coming back. Are you prepared? If it were to happen this afternoon, are you ready? What does preparedness look like? This is essential because the whole point of Jesus words is to tell us that there are things we cannot obtain at the last minute and we definitely cannot borrow spiritual relationships.

The wise virgins cannot help the ones who were unprepared. Whether the text reads "**there may not be enough**" or "**there will certainly not be enough**" the effect is the same, the foresight and preparedness of the wise virgins cannot benefit the foolish virgins when the end comes. Preparedness can neither be transferred nor shared.

Before you cry out but what about mercy? They had been waiting, they ask for help, they beg for the door to be opened.

Now, please listen carefully: "The refusal to recognize or admit the foolish ones must not be interpreted as callous rejection of their lifelong desire to enter the kingdom. Far from it, it is the rejection of those who, despite appearances, never made preparations for the coming of the kingdom."⁷⁵

⁷⁵ John W. Ritenbaugh , The World, the Church, and Laodiceanism, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/137/Self-Control.htm>

The young women in this parable fail by inactivity. They presume a gracious future without preparing for it by active discipleships. This is the definition of foolish for Matthew.⁷⁶

Be prepared. Keep watching.

The outcome for the unprepared is heartbreaking. The bridegroom says: I do not know you. We have no relationship. Door shut. How could this be? This is not a popular message but it is necessary. We need to pause and think, what does preparedness look like in my life? What is it that I need to do now, to have this relationship not just in name, not in appearances but a living, vital relationship?

Let me suggest we prepare by releasing, through action and learning the art/discipline of waiting.

Preparedness – by releasing – I bring this up because in appearance the ten were the same, what was it that made them so unprepared as to miss the boat? Could it be a lifestyle opposite to Jesus' love, is it remaining in sin (something you know is contrary to God's word). I John 1: 6 tells us **"If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth"**. We find so many excuses, I'll deal with that later. Let me enjoy life while I'm young. Let me relax now that I'm retired. I'm not ready to let go of that resentment... You are slowly killing yourself by allowing sin to remain in your life. Today surrender your life anew to Jesus, and each day keep surrendering your life to Jesus, let him truly be your Lord above your preferences.

Preparedness – through action – what will take you deeper. What practice, what exercise will make you stronger, what would revitalize your relationship? We are all at different stages in our spiritual journey, what do you need at this moment, right now? This week I've been making use of a podcast "cultivate connections, Christ centered meditation" a 30 min guided prayer that helps me to remain still in the presence of God, to actually stop and stay with Him instead of rushing through devotions and on to all I have to do... What will take you deeper? Having an accountability partner, someone to whom we say 'ask me how my soul is doing today', 'ask me about my walk of faith, I am committing to go deeper', 'ask me what am I doing'. I am sure we would all say, yes, I want to go deeper. Well then, what are you going to do about it?

If your whole being balked at the end of the story, at the door shut wondering: where is mercy? where is grace? today is the day of mercy, today is the day of grace. Today the door is wide open, Jesus arms are extended, today is the day for you and I to share the love of Jesus so that they may know there is life, forgiveness, love, acceptance in Jesus. Preparedness through action is about you and I changing our posture from spectators to bearers of the good news.

Preparedness – Learning the art/discipline of waiting. What do you do while you wait? Be a light while you keep your eyes in the horizon.

⁷⁶ Alyce McKenzie, The Parables for Today, 63.

Lord Jesus, we are waiting for you, the wait is long. Some here have received the news the wait to see you face to face may be shorter than expected. The truth is that for all of us, it could be today, it could be much later. Help us to make time for that which will better prepare us to receive you with open arms, lamps burning bright, responding with joy not with alarm when we finally hear: “**He is here!**”

We want to be a light to the world not just in name! We want to be an Army of Salvation not just in appearance. Being the people of God for the sake of others. So we pray, Let your Kingdom come, let your will be done.

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Message from Ezekiel 34:11-16; 20-24

Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield

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I don't know what is your opinion of "23 and me" and other such DNA tests, but this week CBC aired an interview with author A. J. Jacobs. In his latest book, "It's all relative – adventures up and down the family tree," he delves into his own genealogy and chronicles his plans for what he hoped would become the largest "family" reunion in history. Through DNA analysis he has discovered his relation to Hillary Clinton, Lady Gaga, Barack Obama. His goal, to help us realize the simple but key truth that we are all somehow related, that it is scientifically true that we are one human family. His hope is that by helping people realize our interconnectedness it may lead us to treat each other better.

The same day I read a recommended spiritual exercise: sit in a public place, a park, an airport and just watch people go by, but as each person goes by think: Jesus died for him, Jesus died for her, I tried it on Friday as I stood ringing the bells, watching people, each so unique, some with head coverings, shaved heads, dressed like models, or like I would dress, of all ages. It really causes you to see people differently. Try it next time you do a kettle shift, it transforms it into a time of prayer. But even more, if we could keep this thought in mind, I am sure this awareness would affect the way we treat one another.

Our DNA may have the world interconnected, yet our care/concern for humanity goes beyond genealogies. Jesus cares, profoundly loves each individual throughout the world. They are loved as I am loved.

Today is the last Sunday in the Christian calendar, the Sunday when we reflect on Christ the King. Our reading from the Epistles lead us praying that our eyes may be opened, **so that we may know Jesus better**. I don't know if you noticed it when we did our Responsive Reading but it seems as the Spirit was opening Paul's eyes to the wonder of who Jesus is, he ran out of vocabulary – *how can I explain to you who Jesus is: He is far above every rule and authority, power and dominion... every name in the present and the future... He fills everything in every way!*

The Message translation expresses Jesus' greatness saying He is: **in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from His rule. And not just for the time being, but forever...**

And so we appropriately sung: "My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord there is none like You."

May our eyes continue to be opened to who Jesus is.

Keep this in mind, as we look at the words from Ezekiel 34.

The context in which Ezekiel ministered: Ezequiel was both a priest and a prophet. He had grown up during the spiritual revival and reforms under King Josiah, then he experienced society's disregard of their relationship with God and, even though he himself was serving the Lord, he suffered the consequence of the people's waywardness and was taken captive in the deportation of 597 BC to Babylon.

What does a person do when removed from their home and place of ministry? Ezekiel continued being a priest and a prophet. He ministered to the exiled Jews in Babylonia and taught them both regarding God's judgment and ultimate blessing.⁷⁷

A critique of the leaders – the shepherds

Have you ever thought that the image of a Shepherd had political implications? Have you ever thought of our Prime Minister as the Shepherd of Canada? Or of the CEO and president of a company, the small business owner as the shepherd of those under her employment?

Ezekiel 34 is a political critique probably of the leaders of Israel and Judah but also the rulers of Babylon. The fact is that because the people had been exploited, the nation had been destroyed. And in Ezekiel 34 we find the nations' leaders referred to as shepherds, emphasizing the ruler's responsibility to establish justice so that the people may flourish.⁷⁸

That is what we want from our leaders, that is what we expect! that they will establish and preserve justice so that we may flourish.

But verses 11-16 are for the people, for the sheep, and it's like reading Psalm 23 in prose. It is powerful. This is almighty God saying, enough! I will search for my sheep, I will seek them, I will rescue them, I will bring them out, I will feed them, I myself will be their shepherd, I will "make them lie down", I will bind the injured, I will strengthened the weak, I will feed them with justice.

If you see yourself at all needing such an intervention in your life, what a hope! This is Almighty God rolling up his sleeves, hands on, interacting with us, caring profoundly and setting things straight.

The hope increases as we read vs. 20-24 **I will save my flock, they shall no longer be ravaged.** (v.21) There we see the promise of the Messiah, the Shepherd King from the line of David. When the Holy Spirit gave these words to the prophet, Ezekiel probably had in mind an immediate restitution of the dynasty of David to the throne in Jerusalem. And they continue waiting...

⁷⁷ Expositor's Bible Commentary, The, Pradis CD-ROM:Ezekiel/Introduction to Ezekiel/Background of Ezekiel, Book Version: 4.0.2

⁷⁸ Margaret Odell, Professor of Religion

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2188

When the early church considered these words, they saw in the Davidic reference an anticipation of Jesus. They made the association with Jesus' words, as we can see recorded, for example, in the Gospel of John, chapter 10 where Jesus describes himself as "the good shepherd". He is the new ruler who cares for the flock (John 10:3-7) and he will provide abundant life (John 10:10). Jesus tells us he came to heal and to save, to forgive, to feed. And if you think of Jesus' style of leadership, He had no shred of self-indulgence in contrast to the leaders described in Ezekiel. He came for the common good.⁷⁹

The words of Ezekiel would have challenged the exiles in Babylon to be a people of integrity and given them hope as they waited. God sees you. God will intervene.

The first Christians saw clearly, God is intervening.

But now today, as we read these words we need to consider what is the Holy Spirit saying to us, today.

On the basis of Ezekiel 34, we could criticize current shepherds... the truth is that our society is governed by the wealthy and strong. A commentator south of the border reflects that tax laws, regulatory agencies... are all administered by the "fat and strong" to their own benefit and to the neglect of the hungry sheep who are without resources. Governments are not responding to the environmental crisis, because regulation might "hurt the economy."⁸⁰ I would suspect it is not much different in Canada. What about the off shore accounts? With each revelation of a new list of names, I am praying please let there not be a respected Christian name among them. The wealthiest sheltering their wealth from taxes which are meant to maintain the wellbeing of all the sheep.

It is easy to point fingers, but Ezekiel 34 does produce a bit of discomfort because it also says **"Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.** The criticism moves from the shepherds to the sheep themselves. And it says: **Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns**

The stronger sheep instead of helping the weaker ones, push them out of their way, they will be held to account!

I myself am stepping in and making things right between the plump sheep and the skinny sheep. Because you forced your way with shoulder and rump and butted at all the weaker animals with your horns (The Message)

I don't know about you, but as I was reading Ezekiel 34 at this time, in the time and place we are living in, I had trouble identifying with the lean sheep, especially

⁷⁹ Walter Brueggemann, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/walter-brueggemann/ezekiel-34-christ-the-king-sunday-on-scripture_b_1097125.html

⁸⁰ Brueggemann

considering what is happening around the world. This is a sobering thought. When the Lord says: **I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.** We all have a measure of power, don't we? How are we using our resources, our means, our power over others?

This is the key question for me, for us today: Are we the sleek and the strong or are we the hands and feet of God through whom He wants to shepherd the flock with justice?

The Gospel reading for today was Matthew 25. There we read of the day when Jesus will come back and He will separate – as he himself describes us – the sheep from the goat. On what basis? I was hungry and you fed (or did not feed) me, I was sick, I was in jail... **Truly I tell you, whatever you did or (did not do) for one of the least of these, you did (or did not do) for me.**' (Matt 25:45)

Some of us here have the skill and influence to address the causes of injustice, others have the gifting to care for those suffering the consequences, we all have a role. We are not only somehow related as human beings, our Lord and Saviour deeply identifies with the least and he points to his children, to the church and says whatever you do for the least you do for me.

Today the bulletin may have seemed a little overwhelming at first reading: support the YP dept, prepare to give for the white fund, volunteer for kettles, give, give, give. What amazes me is that these are all things within our reach. We want to be there for our children, for those within our congregation when they go through a difficult time, but also for our neighbours. The timing of this scripture as we as a congregation are pulling together to raise funds to resource our Community and Family Services so that throughout the year we can continue giving relief and hope to those in need around us is good. And Jesus says, each time you do it, you are doing it for me.

But, Ezekiel 34 challenges us to search deeper into our soul in all honesty, to see if there is any way in which I am using my power for my benefit at the expense of my weaker brother? My resources at the expense of my weaker sister?

We are going to sing song 935.

Key question: Are we the sleek and the strong or are we the hands and feet of God through whom He is shepherding the flock with justice?

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Message from Psalm 90:13

Major Pauline Gruer-Caulfield

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O Lord, How long will it be?

These are the words of someone at the breaking point. Moses in his pain comes before God. Instead of swallowing his feelings, he pours them out and in the process finds renewed strength. We can conclude this from our reading of Deuteronomy 34 where we find him at the end of his life having such a strong relationship with God.

For a few moments we are going to look at the person behind this prayer recorded for us in Psalm 90, and the process he went through.

The person behind the prayer

Deut. 34 just gave us a glimpse into the man. A tremendous leader, the things he did empowered by God, he was so close to the Lord that it is described as “**the Lord knew him face to face.**” The chapter and Moses story end by stating that no one has ever done what he did! Yet, that same chapter reminds us, he was a flawed leader, he took the people all the way to the promised land but he himself was not able to enter because of choices he had made contrary to what God asked him to do. We can see at least two principle messages here, we could say two sides of a coin, on one side we see the warning, as the New Testament tells us: **if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!** I Cor. 10:12, because even Moses, as great as he was, for a moment thought he knew better than God and messed up. The other side of the coin is the message of grace. Though sin caused a significant loss, the loss of a dear dream, God did not give up on Moses. Moses died as “the servant of the Lord.” There is forgiveness, there is restoration, there is hope.

Psalm 90 takes us to a time - we don't know the exact circumstances they were going through - when Moses cried out to God. It must have been a prolonged, trying situation because we find him exclaiming: “**Relent! How long will it be? Have compassion on us...**” v.13 You can almost feel the anguish in his words. Now pay attention to what Moses does. When he finds himself in such desolation he confronts his emotions and he actually writes it down. We know this because we are reading it. He sits down to put his complaint, his cry in writing. God I cannot take it much longer! But when he begins writing first he considers who He is praying to.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place. For the last 40 years of his life Moses along with the Israelites wandered through the wilderness. 40 years having a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night marking the place where they should camp. This was not a metaphorical expression. God had literally been their dwelling place, their refuge. None other than the Creator, the Eternal God, He has been their oasis.

But then we get to v. 3 **You turn men back to dust...** we can say, compared with God humans are nothing but dust. In comparison with God's eternity our brief span of life is like grass. Even if we were to live a thousand years, to God it would be like a day. But it is not the comparison which strikes us, it is the fact that it says: You, You God, turn people into dust. And though it sounds harsh, it is true. God alone has the power over creation, including the life and death of humans.

Obviously we are dealing here with the enduring mystery at the heart of the Bible, namely, the relationship between the sovereign rule of a loving God, the free will he has given us, and the existence of sin, suffering, and death. The last are stumbling stones for many an unbeliever and the source of much doubt for many believers.⁸¹

Last week I found myself talking back to the TV. A futile exercise... I don't know if anyone has watched the Good Doctor. I thought I would give the show a try and in this week's episode a boy who is dying of terminal cancer says: "I don't believe in God, because if I believed in him I would have to believe that he allowed me to get cancer and that would make him a monster and that is too terrible so I rather believe there is no God. That there is nothing after death." I wonder if the writers of this show had read Psalm 90. ... we we read about the wrath of God, the indignation, the anger of God. It is a horrifying image. Now, if you've read the Old Testament you would be familiar with some of the situations, the people who were given every advantage, keep on sinning. It is not that God is a Dictator who cannot stand when people don't do what He has dictated; the problem is that sin is deadly, it tears at our relationships, it tears our relationship with nature, it tears our relationship with God. We live in a world drastically damaged by sin.

As I heard those word: "I rather believe there is not God, there is nothing after death." I found myself saying "no, no, there so much more" and I was thinking of all the people watching this show. My mind went to creation, when Adam and Eve have to leave the Garden of Eden because of their sin, God actually provides clothing for them, they would need protection from the inclemency of a world under the consequence of sin, they would need to be covered, actually that is the first sacrifice we read about in the Bible (Genesis 3:21). Then I thought of the cross, God in a sense, again, covering us through His sacrifice, suffering as He pardoned us. We need to share with our friends, speak about these things so that when suffering comes into their life, they may have the strength that comes from knowing how much God cares.

We can't solve the mystery of pain and suffering in one sermon on this text. But we can assert, with Moses, that yes, God is ultimately in control of all things, even death. Sometimes we are shaken by it, taken by surprise, other times we wonder why so much suffering before we can go to be with Him. At the end of the day we acknowledge, our times are in His hands.

⁸¹ Stan Mast, http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-25a/?type=the_lectionary_psalms

Now, Moses' intention is not so much to raise that large theological issue as it is to assure us that the Lord is our dwelling place. In spite of the brevity of human life, we dwell in the God who is eternal. Though he was crying his heart out, he knew that he was surrounded by the eternal arms of love.⁸²

Let's look at vs. 12 and 13 Moses prays: God, teach us to number our days, teach us to make good use of the time we have today,... before we know it, it is gone.

On Friday my eldest volunteered at TED X and one of the speakers was Jeremie Saunders award winning actor, producer, and podcast host. He has cystic fibrosis, at the age of 10 he discovered the life expectancy of someone with cystic fibrosis was 30. He is now 3 months short of 30. He is campaigning hard to get people to embrace the truth that we are all going to die. Of course, it is true. Unless the Lord surprise us returning within our lifetime, everyone in this room will die. Jeremie's life changed when instead of living under the shadow of death, around the age of 18 he decided to embrace the fact that he had probably 12 more years to live, max. He thought, what do I want to do with the time I have and he went for it. I don't know if he is a Christian or not, but he is doing exactly what Psalm 90 tells us to do, v. 12 prays "**teach us to number our days aright...that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**" So he challenges people, What do you want to do with your life? Get started!

When Moses writes **teach us to number our days**, he has been addressing our mortality, but also and more importantly is the fact that in spite of our few days we keep focusing on the wrong things, he talks about public sin, secret sin, he was trying to guide a people who knew of God but they kept diverting, he himself had also fallen at times and so he prays teach us to number our days. Get started! Get right with God! Get on with living as you were created to live, in close, unhindered relationship with God!

Right after praying teach us to number our days, Moses cries out, **O Lord! How long will it be?** How many times have you made this prayer? Our life may seem over in a puff but when we are in anguish, when there does not seem to be a way out, when we hear chronic, when there's one more medicine added to the list "futile", when our prayers for a prodigal continue to be unanswered, when injustice continues to prevail... we do have those days, don't we. "I don't know if I can take it any more." Moses was there!

But let me remind you again of what he does when his heart is overwhelmed: he remembers who God is – our dwelling place. He recognizes their sin; they keep messing up in very evident ways and in secret, and are suffering for it. And then Moses writes it down, How long will this anguish last? He takes his pain to God.

Moses turns to God and asks him to re-balance, redeem the times of our lives. We may have the life span of morning grass, but God can "**satisfy us in the morning with (His) unfailing love.**" We may have "trouble and sorrow," but by God's grace "**we may sing**

⁸² ibid

for joy and be glad all our days.” “Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, he prays, for as many years as we have seen trouble.”

How is such a re-balancing, and redemption possible? Israel has seen throughout its history that God acts in history, disrupting the natural order of things to accomplish his great purposes. Moses alludes to those historical actions in verse 16. **“May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.”** The most splendid deed God ever did, of course, is the event that was Jesus Christ. In the fullness of time, God broke into history in the person of Jesus, so that we could be saved from our sins and could therefore, live forever. Through Jesus, God changes the times of our lives.⁸³

Because of Jesus Christ, all of the passionate prayers of verses 13-17 become precious promises. Even death has been conquered through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And instead of the futility of a life that passes all too soon, through the recreating grace of God, our life can be filled with purpose. Moses ended his prayer saying: **May the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us: establish the work of our hands for us – yes establish the work of our hands.** Please let it not be futile. In 1 Cor. 15:58 in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ we find the answer to this prayer **“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain (I Cor. 15:58).”**⁸⁴

At the point of writing Psalm 90 it must have seemed to Moses that all the effort, all the sacrifice he had made, all the tears to show them the way to God, to guide them to the ‘promised land’ would be for nothing, these people would end up dying in the wilderness of their rebellion. **God, how long?** God is so tender in His love for us. As we read in Deut 34, the Lord allowed Moses to see the land, Moses, they’ve arrived!

What is the Lord saying to you today through His Word? Who do you identify with? Are you the one still living in sin, in rebellion to God, ignoring the fact that our days are fleeting. God has given you today to come Home, to give your life fully to follow His ways. Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, come Home.

Are you the one caring for others, seeing their suffering, trying to guide them to healing and wholeness. Sometimes we need, like Moses, to be the ones coming to God saying, I don’t know how much longer I can take it. We are going to sing “I need thee every hour” and I invite you, as we all raise our voices in prayer, let us pray with you, come to this place of prayer, pour your heart to Him and let Him renew your strength.

**editor's note: These are preaching notes, not academic essay papers, and so may lack a reference here or there (indeed, they were prepared for preaching and not for wider readership). It is not the intent to withhold credit from a source.*

⁸³ http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-25a/?type=the_lectionary_psalms

⁸⁴ *ibid*

Imagine: or, A Women's Uniform Rant

Danielle Strickland

Things difficult or next to impossible to do in a women's Salvation Army formal uniform, worship freely, kneel without looking foolish. Walk any long distances. Play with kids (Velcro is the sworn enemy of nylons). Sit down (especially on the floor or a low seat). Get in or out of a vehicle with dignity. Doing crafts or making food. Preaching freely (at least the kind that involves any movement). And sometimes (depending on the scale situation) even breathing.

Things that I need to do to accomplish the mission - all the above. So basically, everything that the uniform inhibits is my mission. So why do we insist on wearing an outfit that makes our mission more difficult and cumbersome? Good question.

I've been staying out of this argument for a long time. But I felt compelled to weigh in. Let's have the talk. I think it's gone beyond semantics and differences of opinion. I think the tradition, formal uniform of the Salvation Army and our organizations insistence on it boils down to idolatry. There I've said it. Let me explain. I guess the best way to start is to take all the rhetoric as to why we still wear it: Keep in mind that I'm just going to ignore the misogynistic reality of forcing women to wear nylons, skirts and high heels in 2017. It may be against the law for any other business to do this anymore in America⁸⁵ but I'm getting sidetracked here by my own personal pain. Let's get to those traditional arguments.

#1. It identifies us as 'different' and that helps us witness. What would you say most people think we are when we are in uniform? I'd say flight attendant ranks in the top 3. Military. Police. Government agent of some kind. Meter maid. Those are all things people have guessed I am in uniform. Now, to be sure, we look different. We stand out. We look official. But there are two fundamentally flawed positions about this argument.

To the people in the most need, we look like 'them'. The official, government, police etc. We look exactly like they do. Why would we want to identify with 'them' when we are supposed to be with the people we serve. You would have thought Booth Tucker nailed this problem with his prophetic Jesus styled approach to the invasion of India. Gone were the military tunics with colonial hints of power and rank and importance. Off came the shoes, ensuring solidarity with the untouchable classes and on went the traditional Indian garb adapted to the salvationist messages, ensuring a gospel that was rooted in a cultural norm rather than any human power. Even down to the 'dot' on the forehead. If we took a page out of our own history of adaptation I wonder what a uniform in the urban inner city would look like - Converse and tattoos? What would a uniform in a rural small town consist of - Cowboy boots?

⁸⁵ <http://www.natlawreview.com/article/high-heels-workplace-can-employers-still-require-women-to-wear-them>

In the best cases the uniform still works as a way to stand out as different than others. But in what way? In my experience the uniform often works as an intimidating barrier for the most part (with some exceptions usually among those who already know what the Salvation Army is). The deeply troubling part of this particular argument is that the difference is on the outside. In other words, it's what we wear that sets us apart – rather than HOW WE LIVE that makes us different. This is a KEY area that needs addressing. And it might be an easy thing to simply ask who is getting the most people saved these days? What churches, denominations, movements, para-church groups are gaining the most ground? Campus Crusade (the Cru) has distributed 2.5 Billion copies of the Four Spiritual Laws; 6 Billion viewings of The Jesus Film. They've had 3.5 million conversations just from their *I Found It* Campaign according to Wikipedia. The top three churches in the US by net increase (at least 5000 people in a year) were non-denominational and two were Southern Baptist. None of them wear uniforms. Here is a list of the top 100 fastest growing churches in America (notice how **none of them** require their members to wear a uniform).⁸⁶ How arrogant is it of us to suggest that the uniform is the best method of evangelism when in many parts of the world our corps and converts are shrinking?

#2. It unites us. Truly the mission and identity of Salvationists unites us around the globe. There is no question this is one of the most exciting things about being in The Salvation Army – the global community. I've been to a few countries and I've got to tell you that the Indian Sari uniform did not make me feel disconnected from the SA when I was there. I thought officers wearing Bermuda shorts was awesome and the Hawaiian shirt uniform made me want to move there - immediately. We've already make some small cultural tweaks to our uniform but what stops us from adapting our uniform to meet the contemporary standards of our current culture? Dis-unity? Really? We feel like people would feel alienated from each other if we adapted the uniform to suit the cultural specifics of a geographical place? I beg to differ. I think the adaptations would be evidence of our deeper unity in mission. Again, it would get us past the surface of things and straight to the heart of things. The things that really unite Salvationists is our common mission. And anything that helps us do that better and more effectively is the way of unity. True unity is not a false external standard of 'sameness' but a celebration of diversity for the sake of the lost.

#3. It gives people a sense of dignity. I'm just going to be as kind as I can here. I understand the uniform is a sacred thing. So, let me just describe to you the way the last four corps I led did their uniform shopping. We found a traditional corps and asked if we could have access to their 'basement' or 'closet' supplies of old uniforms that didn't fit their people anymore (or more accurately fit people who weren't there anymore) so we could find a few things that might fit our people. You see, none of the people I've enrolled as soldiers in the last decade could afford a uniform themselves. Dignity might not be the word I would use as I led people to rummage around the middle-class corps closets to see if they might find something that would 'do' for them.

⁸⁶ <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/outreach-100-fastest-growing-churches-2016.html>

Travel with me as I went to a music concert at a famous Salvation Army Corps years ago where an amazing singing company sang a goose bumps rendition of 'your grace still amazes me'. I had recently made friends with a seven-year old girl who was belting it out from the front row. At lunch, afterwards I told her she was amazing. And she lowered her head and started to cry. I asked her what was wrong and she showed me her nails. She had forgotten to take off her nail-polish and had been scolded for not wearing the uniform with dignity. The irony of the song she sang and the scolding she received was not lost on me. If that's dignity, then dignity be damned.

Now, travel with me to Zimbabwe and many other African countries. They love their uniforms. I travelled to remote villages and the elders would call the salvationists to come and they would come in their full uniforms with even their hats. Beautiful white hats standing out against the backdrop of the red African earth. It was endearing. Well, that was until I went to the trade and found out how much those hats cost. They were 45 American dollars each. That was more than those villagers made in a month (if they were working). I asked the local officer why they wasted their money on a hat, when they could have fed their children, and she said, 'because the Bible commands we cover our heads.' Great. Now we have miss-communicated the gospel message, badly translated scripture, perpetuated patriarchy and robbed widows and children of much needed resources for their own survival. Dignity indeed.

And what of the dignity of those who picked the cotton and stitched the fabric of our formal attire? What's that? You don't know who made them? Or where the material came from? Yes. That's correct. The supposed symbol of our mission and calling is dripping with the same blood as the corporate world it really represents. Buying and selling products with no regard to the people who make them. How can I wear a symbol of missional calling to the poor while refusing to challenge the systems that impoverish them?⁸⁷ Oh, Salvation Army, wake up to the incredibly calling that is yours.

Imagine with me:

Skinny jeans with shields on the pocket.

Converse with OTHERS stitched into the fairly-traded fabric.

Sombreros with Salvation Banners on heads that bob to the rhythm of God's kingdom come.

African robes with colors a plenty and in the wild west cowboy boots with shiny shields painted on the leather hide.

Women and children working to stitch our diverse uniform clothing in factories that pay them a fair wage and provide dignity while they work. Stitching justice and salvation into the fabric before we even consider putting them on.

⁸⁷ The 3 Trade's I've spoken with about fair-trade and the Biblical imperative to challenge the clothing industry are unable or unwilling to ask the companies they contract to ensure a fair-trade policy. Their concerns are rooted in the high costs potentially associated with the changes. Others suggest that many of our products are made in the USA, but still refuse to ensure the cotton they are made from to be fair-trade certified. The global fashion industry remains one of the major offenders of human trafficking and human rights violations. <https://www.raconteur.net/business/ethical-issues-remain-in-the-fashion-industry>

Oh, I'm sure in many boardrooms, courtrooms and rotary clubs across Western Nations the business attire of the formal salvation army uniform is appropriate. And when it is – please wear it with holy pride (once it's ethically made).

Instead of relying on an external rule-based requirement why don't we let the truth of God's calling be seen with our lives. Why don't we freely mobilize to get to the business of salvation for every tribe and color and language and culture!!

Let down the hair, release the afros, grow the beards, take off the shoes, and bring on EVERY color! Let the expression of salvation be seen in every possible culture in every possible way. Let the mission OUT of the box. Let the Army mobilize in every imaginable way to get the job done. Let freedom be our uniform, justice be our tunic, and grace be our song.

Now, that's a march of witness the world is waiting to see.