



ICDF Networks

July 2020

AWARe



Hello to you all at this very challenging time.

I hope you will enjoy and learn from the various contributions to this Academics, Writers and Researchers (AWARe) Network. One of the things that I find most interesting and exciting in AWARe is the wide range of people, geographical spread, areas of dance/arts areas and their willingness to share with ICDF some of their activities and passion.

In this newsletter, there are some longer articles and some shorter ones. You will find longer articles by Lucy Jarasius (a response to Covid-19), Mary Jones (the origins and biblical basis for CaraMayan), Lisa Wilson (embodied and prophetic declarations with accompanying screen shots, in response to Covid-19), Noel Filemon (the issues of perfectionism in dance ministry) and Steve Scott (the woman at the well, in the book of John, with accompanying art works). Shorter contributions come from Lucy Jarasius (2 poems), Christine Gershom from India (a current ICDF Diploma student responding to questions about what Christian dance is) and myself, Debbie Bright (Covid-19 and creativity).

Thank you so much for your contributions, everyone. And, to those who hoped to write for this newsletter, but found it impossible, thank you for your positive thoughts and intentions.

Blessings and love
Debbie Bright

Covid-19 and Creativity – Debbie Bright

From my reading so far, I understand that some people have found covid-19 lockdown a time of immense creativity because they have suddenly found themselves with time and reduced responsibilities; more headspace and thinking time to embark on long-delayed creative projects. On the other hand, for many, this has been and continues to be definitely not a time when they are able to be creative. Heightened alertness and hypervigilance, uncertainties about the present and the future, misery for themselves and/or others, inability to breathe, grieve, conceive as they would under 'normal' circumstances. For some, it is a time of non-working and financial terror. For others, the heightened demands of home, family, functional and dysfunctional relationships, violence, desperation, depression. For others, it has or continues to be a time of massive upheaval, working beyond exhaustion, enduring fragmented, shredded family life, threat and risk, trying to meet gargantuan needs in health, welfare, sanitation, housing... For yet others, myself and my husband included, it has been a time of hugely increased workload, working online from home. Looking for ways to help support others who are in dire need, unemployment and ill-health, or those who have suddenly been thrown into an online world for work or study in ways that they have never encountered or needed to encounter before.

Our creativity is stretched, exhausted. We rejoice and are warmed by videos of those who have found new online ways to connect with others in creative projects, making music together from within homes or balconies, stunning and inspiring solo concerts for neighbours, gatherings on balconies or street frontages to socialise, from a distance, exciting international choreographic projects. My creativity seems to have been drained out of its usual genres and redeployed into cooking and craft projects, relating to family and strangers from a distance, redetermining needs and priorities, heightened awareness of how fortunate we are and how crushingly hard it must be for so many, many others.

Now, in our isolated island nation of New Zealand, we have sought to collectively conform to the recommendations of science and health professionals to create our own New Zealand-wide bubble of safety, for now; holding our collective breaths and wondering if it will last, praying that our borders will remain secure and what will happen if the virus does reappear. Now, I finally find some time and headspace to write, to dream of choreographing and performing more dance, to exploring the arts once again...breathing in colourful, rich-textured imaginings of joy and pain ...

And, for those who are still in the depths of misery, for those who are exhausted and stretched beyond all imagining, for those who find their creativity challenged and expanded, and for those who find there is just no space left for their usual creative embodied aliveness, what can I say but *kia kaha* (be strong, take courage)?



“There are no 'if's' in God's world. And no places that are safer than other places. The center of His will is our only safety - let us pray that we may always know it!”

- Corrie Ten Boom

For information about AWARE (Artists, Writers and Researchers):

To connect with Debbie Bright ... debbieabright@gmail.com

Network Page on ICDF website ... <http://icdf.com/en/networks/academics-writers-researchers>

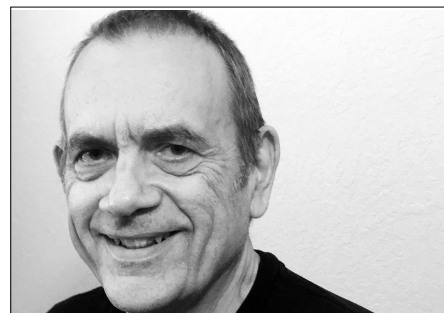
On Facebook search for ICDF Academics, Writers and Researchers - AWARE

The Woman at the Well - Steve Scott

*"Sing, barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the LORD.
(Isaiah 54:1)*

I want to explore a very well-known story from the Gospel of John. As I am pulling this section from a larger manuscript, I briefly have to talk about a couple of the main resources I am using to shine a light into some of the corners of this story. I go into more detail on these resources in the larger manuscript. I simply have to give them a nod here. I will add a brief list of citations at the end.

One thing I note is the emergence of 'Biblical Performance Criticism.' This approach to the Bible would draw our attention back onto the rhetorical and performance aspects of storytelling and then asks us how this change of focus impacts our hearing and understanding of scripture?? Can you imagine being there as John first told his sequence of stories about his friend, and risen Lord, Jesus? Does this add some depth and color to the picture?



Of course, we are not a first century listener in Israel. These stories draw upon the shared common knowledge and cultural traditions of both the storyteller and the listener. As Biblical Scholars like Richard Hays are pointing out some of the echoes and allusions to their shared cultural traditions might well draw upon Old Testament materials and Ancestral narratives, but sometimes it would do so in quite subtle and understated ways. It was not always a case of 'verse and chapter' correspondence or exact wording. Also, we can see in the Gospel of John that the author wanted to emphasize the way that images and symbols in the Old Testament and related traditions were all connected to the person of Jesus. John's Gospel talks of 'Lamb of God' and a miraculous source of wine at a wedding. It alludes to a temple, torn down and rebuilt in a few days. It refers to a brazen serpent on a pole, and a giver of living water in the wilderness. Echo and allusion as well as image and symbol were intended to fire the imagination of that first audience listening to John. We should keep this in mind as we listen with them.



Painted by Quesrcino (1640)

The story of the woman at the well is a very well-known one and John has pulled out all the stops! There is a lot of tension, bad blood and complicated history between the Jews and the Samaritans. We can ask, why did Jesus travel through Samaria in the first place? Some have written of the Mission of God, and the Son's obedience to that mission. Others suggest that Jesus needed to travel and had to take a short cut through Samaria in order to avoid the increasingly inquisitive and hostile Religious leaders. (Do not forget John is telling these stories as a sequence of episodes. There was the incident in the temple in John 2, and the conversation with Nicodemus in John 3.) Still others suggest that Jesus left the area where his cousin John was baptizing out of some consideration for him. Jesus and His disciples were attracting more people. (See John 3:22-4:3)

John the Baptist himself regarded his cousin's growing popularity as a sign of God's blessing. John goes on to compare himself to a 'friend of the bridegroom' who is happy to hear the Bridegroom's voice. This allusion to the 'voice' might be an echo of the words of Jeremiah (Jer 33:11). Listeners might also recall a recent story of a wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12). However, at this wellside, in the heat of the day, it is a very different story. Here is the man who saved that village wedding by miraculously providing upwards of 120 gallons of the finest wine now reduced to sitting by a stone well and almost begging for a drink of water from a woman of the 'wrong' ethnocultural background (!!). If I had been there among those first listeners, would I have been mistaken in picking up a hint of dramatic (or comedic) irony in this opening well side scene?

The Woman at the Well ... continued

Could things get worse? The listeners are aware of the longstanding tensions between Jew and Samaritan. These tensions involve ancient land claims and rival temple reconstruction projects. There are ethnic tensions, political betrayals and spiritual disagreement in the mix as well.

The potentially scandalous story unfolds. He is talking to a woman. She is from a despised 'enemy' group. The storyteller explains that the other disciples were shopping for food. He then points out (or she reminds Jesus) that even sharing drinking vessels between Jews and Samaritans is strictly frowned upon.

The story takes place by a well. Those listening will (no doubt?) recall that ancestral characters like Isaac, Jacob, and Moses met their future potential brides at the side of a well just like this one. (See Genesis 24, Genesis 29, Exodus 2) Our storyteller wants to keep the wedding imagery and symbolism in play. Do not forget the earlier water, wine and wedding story. The storyteller has also just reminded them that John the baptizer referred to himself as a 'friend of the bridegroom.' However, this Samaritan woman who comes to the well is very different to those other bridal figures. She is not some virginal daughter, in the company of other women, coming at the cool of day. She is alone, and based on some of her subsequent remarks, somewhat frustrated at having to collect water in the burning heat. She is surprised when Jesus speaks to her and asks for a drink. She gets over her shock and decides to have a bit of fun at the expense of this desperately thirsty Jewish man. She proceeds with a bit of down to earth banter. When Jesus offers HER a drink, she asks Him how He hopes to provide such a drink with 'no bucket' and rhetorically asks if he is 'greater than our ancestor Jacob, who provided this well' for servants and flocks to drink from.' (John 4:12)



Statue from Siem Reap, Cambodia

In this story Jesus initially comes off as vulnerable in a potentially tense situation. However, we can see the creative way Jesus draws upon layers of cultural history in order to set the stage. The familiar references to water, weddings, ancestry, land and tenacious women all somehow point the way for what He wants to say about Himself. Yet none of it is forced, or contrived. Both Jesus's actions by the well and John's masterful retelling are good theater and storytelling. There is a hint of poetry about it all, as well.

As the story proceeds, things begin to unravel. Her witty repartee with Jesus is predicated upon the fact that she takes His words literally (if not seriously). If I were there, listening, perhaps I would catch echoes of the earlier (feigned?) ignorance of Nicodemus. Incidentally, John has set up some interesting contrasts, as he did with the earlier stories about weddings and the temple. The learned Nicodemus came at night. This woman came at mid-day, in the light (and the heat!). There are contrasts. Are there (also) underlying continuities? They both take Jesus's words at literal face value. Also, Jesus answers both Nicodemus and this woman by making subtle allusions to the wilderness experience of Israel. The story of the brazen serpent AND the story of the miraculous water supply both come from Numbers 21. However, in John's story, she says that she would love some of this water Jesus is talking about. Jesus does not correct her somewhat 'literalistic' misunderstanding. He simply asks her to fetch her husband. She speaks literally again, providing the barest facts about her marital status. Jesus commends her 'truthfulness' (ironically?) and points out that she has been through several marriages and is no longer under the covering/protection of a husband. She is living with a man who is not her husband. We do not know, from the text itself, why her marriages broke up (inability to bear children?). We do not even know what the exact nature of this current relationship is. She acknowledges Jesus's insight into her current status by calling him a prophet. Some suggest she is embarrassed and wants to change the subject. Others propose she is still being a bit sarcastic. Nonetheless, she wants his 'prophetic' insight into a long standing issue between her tribe and His. She asks Him about which temple is the correct one for truly worshipping God. This new question opens the door for Jesus to talk about the imminent collapse of the entire temple system, the nature of true worship, and Himself as the restorer of all things.

The Woman at the Well ... continued

The Disciples return.....and ruin a perfectly good moment! But do they? At first they keep quiet. When they DO open their mouths, it is to misunderstand what Jesus says about food. He proceeds to patiently, but creatively, use the imagery of food to point them to the work He (and they) are being given to do. Meanwhile the woman goes back to her community. Her sight has begun to deepen into insight.....her thinking has changed. Her speech has changed. She is speaking openly and transparently about her meeting with Jesus. Incidentally, she leaves her water jar behind at the side of the well. She has met a new source of living water.

Jesus, and the storyteller, take hold of images, symbols, and traces of cultural heritage in order to turn them upside down and picture a completely new possibility. As we listen again to the dialog between Jesus and the woman, and Jesus and the returning and clueless disciples, perhaps we hear how these open and somewhat exploratory conversations can lead to deeper insight and changes in perspective. Art can do that.

Some source material

<https://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org/>

Bibliography

Hays, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*. Baylor University Press , 2016.

Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of John*, 2 Volumes. Baker Academic, 2010.

Note: The images are provided to show how different artists have imagined the story that is critically explored.

Steve Scott would love to explore and discuss art, creativity and ministry and the Gospel of John with folk
Please drop him a line at semionaut21@gmail.com



Mid-4th Century catacomb painting

Struggling To Be The Best I Can - Noel Filemon

There was a time in my life as a dance minister, where I had to wrestle with perfectionism. This was a very dark period in my life. And to be honest, I never really recognized it as perfectionism, but I would rather interpret it as “striving toward excellence”, after all isn’t that what the Lord expects of me as a Christian artist? He is a perfect God after all !!!!!!!

Focus on the imperfections

For me as a dancer it was always important to be well prepared, before I went out and minister. Physically as well spiritually. Which is a good thing to do I guess. I took time to put a choreography together, and it had to be pitch perfect. I wouldn’t miss my daily exercises for the world, I needed to be “excellent” in what I’m doing, even if my body was giving signals that it’s burning out. It was for the Lord and it had to be flawless, no mistakes could be made. On the day of the solo performance in church when I made a small mistake or the dance was not executed as I wanted, I felt frustrated and lonely. I wanted to hide and felt sad and empty. And even ashamed. Blaming myself, why things didn’t go as I had planned and prepared. Although people came up to me and told me how blessed they were, and of course were not aware of the mistakes I made, I still had an unsatisfying feeling that it was not good enough. When people tried to compliment me or tell me how blessed they were, I often thought by myself: if you only knew? If one small thing went wrong, everything went wrong. I was very disappointed in myself. How can things go wrong when I’ve prepared myself for weeks? As a perfectionist I was maximizing the negative and minimizing the positive. It is the most horrible feeling.

The root of the problem

Looking back at my life, I always had the urge to show myself. That was a way to compensate my hurts or to camouflage them. I needed people to show me affection, like me, love me and look up to me. The appreciation and the compliments of people around me became very important for me. Being bullied and not doing well in school, especially in Primary school, were some of the hurts I needed to overcome. Of course I was unaware of the fact that I was beating myself up. I came down very hard on myself which led to a lot of negative self-talk. Even when I accepted Christ as my personal Saviour I still had the urge to prove myself to God. I needed to spend a certain amount of time in prayer with God. And if one day I couldn’t meet the requirement, which I had imposed on myself I felt awful and guilty. Because I have disappointed God once again. Back then I was unaware of the yoke of legalism which became a heavy burden. I had high and unrealistic expectations of myself to the point that my body as well as my spirit became exhausted. I needed to train a few hours a day, and spent a few hours a day in prayer. The result was frustration and disappointments every time. Because all of my hard work did not yield the desired fruits.



Almost giving up

The whole situation brought a lot of fear and uncertainty in my life as a dance minister. I gave up spontaneous dance for many years. Although the Holy Spirit prompted me very often to start dancing spontaneously, I just couldn’t. I had solo performances once in a while in church and outside the church. And that was it. But I wanted to “Break Free” in dance. And I think spontaneous dance is an excellent way to do that. No boundaries, no worries about technique, no worries about execution and no worries about imperfections. The desire was there, but the boldness and liberty I once had were all gone. I had no idea where or how to start, and the thought even crossed my mind- will I be able to do it again? All of a sudden I became so self-conscious that I began to doubt myself. At the same time the only thing that went through my mind was: Will I be able to execute the movements well? Will I be able to dance the steps correctly? Perfectionism was still haunting me. There was a constant war going on in my spirit-man.

Struggling To Be The Best I Can ... continued

A dance of healing of restoration

In July 2014 I was in the U.S. for a conference and there I met the most lovely dance couple, Dean Slater and his wife Jamyee Pleasant. I went to church with them on a Sunday. They are used to ministering together, and it is amazing to see how they flow together in dance. That particular Sunday I sat at the back of church. Although I wore my dance garment I didn't have the intention to dance. Dean and his wife were ministering with billows in front of the church, while I was sitting at the back of the church worshipping. At a given moment someone came up to me, telling me that Dean was calling me. I thought by myself: Oooh no, no way will I go up front to dance. I felt trapped and I had no other choice than to go with the flow. While they were ministering with billows, it was as if I stepped in a river. And after years, I danced spontaneous again. It was a dance of healing and a dance of restoration. Every time they moved with the billows over me it was like yokes were being broken. My struggles with perfection that I couldn't express through words, I could move out in dance. It was life changing. When I came back home, I started dancing spontaneously with that same liberty. The Lord knows our hearts and He has His own unique way to meet us where we are.

Lessons learned

One of the most important things that I've learned is that I have to be focused on the finished work of Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour. I don't need to prove myself because He has already done it. There is nothing extra I need to do, to please Him.

He loves me and accepts me for who I am. I was not even aware that some hurts from my past, were an open door to strive toward perfectionism. I've learned to celebrate anything and everything positive that comes my way. We've got to learn to savor, for the glory of God, the good things God does in us and through us. Only God is perfect. The most important thing is to know Him. Psalm 46:10 -Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. Let God be God.

Christian Dance - Christine Gershom (ICDF Diploma Student)

What is Christian Dance?

Christian dance I think is the performance of dance with the purpose of worshipping and honoring God with our body and its movements. It is accompanied by music that is God-glorifying or gospel-centered so as to somehow convey biblical concepts or Christian values to the viewers.



Describe a time when God spoke to you through watching a dance performance

I viewed a dance done by a person at our recent ICDF gathering in Kanyakumari, Chennai and I was moved to tears by it. She danced to the song "New wine" by Hillsong Worship.

I had been listening to the song before I attended the conference but it never came alive to me as it did when she danced for it. I still remember being transfixed by the power in her dance. She was deliberate in every action and her actions for the lines- "In the crushing, in the pressing, you are making new wine" and "I came here with nothing, But all You have given me Jesus bring new wine out of me" was so strongly resonating

with me since I had recently walked through a hard season and I realized only then that that was how God was beginning a new work in my life. I hadn't seen it in that light until I watched her dance. After she was done I remember looking around me and watching many people wipe tears from their eyes. I believe they too experienced something powerful as she danced.

face-off faith

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If we put on our collective Intelligent Arty Face
Would we be a match for Artificial Intelligence?
On the face of it,
I say YES! Bring it ON
I think we could pull it OFF!
We're pretty switched on people
(although on and off, I suspect, we are perceived as off-putting)

ON ... OFF
ON ... OFF
ON ... OFF
Is that too much binary thinking?
On the faith of it, I say YES!
It's too Black and White
coz our deep convictions ache to reflect and refract
the spectrum of glorious transformational light
Burst of colour to split dark-night life!

ON... OFF... ON
Trinitarian code for abunDANCED Life
a WAY of knowing
a TRUTH showing
a LIFE glowing

a river flowing from deep down within
blood flowing right up to our collective creative visage
matched DNA to the Saviour of the whole human race
more than a match for Artificial Intelligence... face-off faith?!

Algorithms fan global panic
Pandemia virals out-of-control
Miasmatic bio-menace calls for a solution of gargantuan proportions
defying the face of faithless humanity, crying-empty as the giant barrenness of loo-paper shelves

How can we stop the injustice, the epi-slaughter of innocents, the trail of incompetence in government decisions?

Humbly,
Sing your Songs
Dance your Dances
Write your rightness
Make Music as you Paint from the palette of God's Good Graces
Theopoeticise, Strategise, get divine-perspective eyes
Behold, I am doing a New Thing!
Can you not perceive it?

Let's conceive it...
Rivers of life-light in the world's dry desert of pain...
We will not curl up and die, we will rise up again!

If we put on our collective Intelligent Arty Face
We would surely outmatch Artificial Intelligence?
I say YES! Bring it ON!
Fend OFF the fake
Choose LIFE in the FAITH of it
Viral WorshIp PandEmic, a face-off of faith
V-WIPE the world... live, flourish, create!!!

Internet illustration: scientific doodles

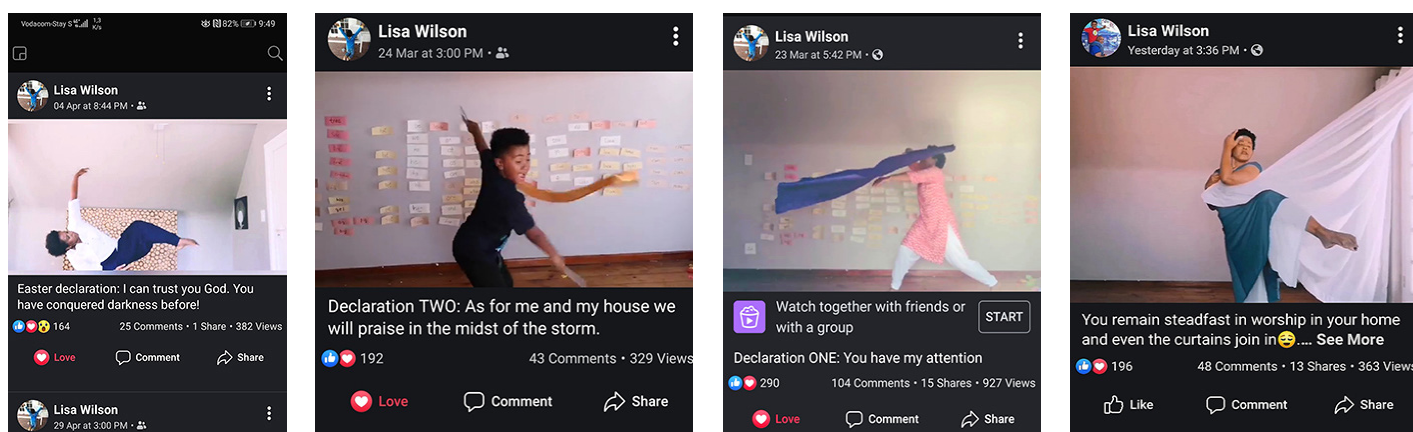
Dancing Resilience - Lisa Wilson

None of us will deny that the pandemic of COVID-19 brought some unprecedented challenges. The disruption to our normal ways of being has been intense. Yet, it also brought new opportunities. One of those opportunities for me was to be able to spend quality time with the family as everyone, including academics, was forced to remain at home. It was wonderful to experience the whole family of three on a daily basis and in creative ways. Dance was definitely one of the vehicles through which we connected as a family and one of the strategies we used to activate our faith in Christ during the COVID-19 crisis.

Alice Walker penned a book titled *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*. As a family we spent our time dancing in different spaces in our home and publicly sharing these dance videos on facebook. Dance has always been a space of healing and spiritual restoration for me and so my natural instinct was to dance to help others and myself process what was happening around us. During this period of COVID lockdown I felt this great sense of urgency in the spirit to move prophetically and not just sit and watch the happenings. Spiritually, I felt that kingdom artists had a rich opportunity in this crisis to publicly declare God's word and presence to a world whose heart was tender and silent enough to listen and receive. I found myself compelled to dance in the hard times, unmasked, uncensored and with a deep sense of spiritual 'awokeness'.

My dance videos which were a series of eight embodied and prophetic declarations were inspired by scriptures of repentance such as James 4:8 that states. "Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands...and purify your hearts...". As well as scriptures of faith and hope such as Isaiah 26:3 that states that God will keep in perfect peace, those whose minds are steadfast on Him, because they trust in Him. These were posted on my personal facebook page and shared multiple times by viewers on other pages. The responses from those who engaged with them were overwhelming. My obedient act of embodying what I felt God wanted His people and the world to hear at this time and publicly sharing these movement experiences seemingly brought much needed hope, peace, encouragement, inspiration and positive upliftment to people across the globe. The facebook comments provide much evidence of this.

One comment that I found particularly special was from a long-time friend and fellow dancer Anika Marcelle who resides in Trinidad and Tobago. She wrote: "Lisa, you have not left your position from the altar. Still reporting for duty fervently. Thank you for this sis. #Moving" (*Facebook post, March 23*). In this time of COVID-19 I was dutifully reminded of the power of dance to strengthen our hearts, bodies, minds and souls in hard times, and its ability to connect us deeply to ourselves, our Creator, and each other. Let's keep dancing in and through the challenges, our bodies are great tools in God's hands.



New-thing Faith in a Covid-conscious, Call-for-change World - Lucy Jarasius

We all start out life as babies...

It's as though life is just waiting to be lived! We are little human bundles of joy... well I guess we are if we are wanted and welcomed. Even at such an early stage, life, for some is already turning out to be a challenge, to be rather messy. Maybe we aren't wanted and celebrated, and it seems all uphill from here. We all know what messes even the best of babies in the happiest of households can make, but if our birth family is a broken one, we may be thought of as messing up somebody else's life, right from our arrival!

Individual suffering is certainly debilitating, but when multiplied across communities and consistently, relentlessly perpetuated by systemic injustice, our whole world is crippled!

One of the most beautiful aspects of the Christian faith is the fact that no matter what the beginning, what the process, what the outcomes during our lives, we are assured that God did not make a mistake allowing us to be conceived and born into the world so loved that Jesus came into it... He came as a baby, into the context of a conquered and abused people group, and possibly to some relatives of Mary and Joseph at the time, thought of as a mistake or as a life-mess. Psalm 139 assures us that God knows each and every one of us intimately, possibly better than we know ourselves. As quoted from The Message bible,

“You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
The days of my life all prepared
before I'd even lived one day”.



That is a comforting reminder whenever we find ourselves unaccepted, unloved, unappreciated, or any number of the “uns” we are likely to face throughout our lifetimes. We CAN have faith that the Lord's revealing and healing “light” can shine into any dark place, at any time, bringing the opportunity for transformation and growth... no matter how cruel or change-necessary the situation might seem.

We are, in fact offered the opportunity to be “reborn”, so to speak.

Jesus said to Nicodemus: The Message bible John 3:5-8

“Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

7-8 “So don't be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”

Some people seem to breeze through life, but in reality, they are most likely to have experienced or will experience storm-tossing situations, just like the rest of us do. For some of us, it's worse because we have been systemically prevented from participating in life from the perspective of a “level playing field” and have been denied “boots” so as to prevent “pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps”, no matter how desperately we may have wanted to.

My prayer is that through reading this article, you will have the fire of your passions stoked by the compassion of God to warm and heal your heart so that you may take up the call to be a change-maker. To be a conduit of healing for the people in the Covid-conscious world around you, that you will shine your little light, which is really a reflection of God's glory and brilliance. In John Chapter 8, Jesus refers to himself as “the light of the world”, but, surprisingly perhaps, in Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus calls his followers “the light of the world”! Wow, we can really see that God means business, good business, in fact the kind of mercy-mediating, just know-how, transformational business in which we can participate by having faith in God's faithfulness, and applying that faith to all life's situations, even the ones we cannot understand at the time why they happened at all, because they seem so unjust or traumatic.

New-thing Faith ... continued

Enough with the baby talk and baby walk, we have to grow up... to mature. That means living through the good times and the bad, the messy and sad. We may feel as though “life goes on, it gets so heavy, the wheel breaks the butterfly, every tear a waterfall” as the lyrics to a popular song by the band Coldplay say. Covid-induced lockdown may have corralled us into a dark tunnel experience of “home” for what feels like far too long. Will we ever come out the other side? Can we dare to believe that the light at the end of the tunnel isn’t a train coming towards us? Faith forms, informs, and transforms us... un-norms our mind’s thinking so that we may make room in our hearts for the light of Jesus in the blazing luminosity of resurrection power, to lovingly show us the pathway to healing and restoration... even if the circumstances around us do not change or do not change quickly enough. When we are transformed from within, we are equipped, not to just survive, but so that we may thrive. If we want to stay in the dark, in faithlessness and ignorance, life can be a very dark experience, indeed. Matthew Chapter 6 (NIV) warns us that “if your eyes are unhealthy,[a]your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”



It’s like a super sad movie. What is the saddest movie you’ve ever seen? I always cry at the end of Tristan and Isolde. It’s an ancient story of mistaken identities, betrayal, love and inevitability... The hero shouldn’t die and leave a grieving lover and family behind! We know such stories are super sad because we know the story goes contrary to what we innately know we were created for: the joy of abundant life... for Shalom... the kind of peace and harmony where healing, forgiveness and joy, abound, where everything is functioning as it should, FOR

EVERYONE, as it was designed by the Divine Designer to flourish.

Something goes wrong, badly wrong. The potentialled life of loving relationships turns into a nasty mess. Innocence is lost, the lights go out. We are left in the dark, wondering, and mourning the passing...

Ecclesiastes, the book in the Bible that bemoans the futility of life, puts it this way in Chapter 6 (The Message bible) “3-5 Say a couple have scores of children and live a long, long life but never enjoy themselves—even though they end up with a big funeral! I’d say that a stillborn baby gets the better deal. It gets its start in a mist and ends up in the dark—unnamed. It sees nothing and knows nothing, but is better off by far than anyone living.”

The preacher/teacher/author of this book uses the terrible image of miscarriage/still birth to get his point across. Some readers of this article have been touched by this kind of grief. I am one of them. While I was on a dance ministry trip to Fiji a few years ago, my daughter miscarried a baby, the third time this had occurred in fifteen months... a faith-challenging tragedy for the family. The questions get asked. Why? Where’s God in this mess? Heart wrenching, gut-churning, mind-numbing cries for the meaning of it all... sometimes mysterious “no answer” is a better answer than the well-meaning but often hurtful comments made by people who care. Many systematically oppressed peoples of the world, often First Nations peoples, can relate to patronisation and pity being heaped upon them by well-meaning folks, and of the sting of that on top of the festering wounds of unresolved historical disrespect, abuse and generational trauma. Going deep into theodicy, the journey with the God of goodness in times of suffering and experience of evil, challenges our faith.

I often say, that intercessors have to “live the thing” to give their prayers compassionate authenticity i.e. the ability to “suffer with”. Jesus suffered as one of us... the True Human experience. His resurrection gives us hope. However the case of the loss of a child, no matter how young and tiny or old and mature, is a grief that is difficult and time-dependent to heal. The loss of cultural identity and the wounds of such things as genocide can seem to take aeons to be taken seriously and adequately addressed. It can be a long time before we can feel as though we are walking in the light of day again...

The Fiji trip was a strange time of Kairos experience... the right place at the right time for Kingdom purposes, equipping the saints for the ministry through the release of the Five-fold giftings through dance and related arts... and the experience of the reality of Chronos time... the clock measurement kind of time... I was separated from my daughter in her hour of need and had to wait days to get home to comfort her in the way only a mother can.

It was strange also because during the time of my flight over there, something wonderful occurred... My husband’s younger son and his wife added a healthy baby girl to the family! We gained one and we lost one... how can you experience deep joy and deep grief at the same time? We are designed that way. We are made in God’s image. God surely rejoices about and grieves for our crazy mixed up, change-necessary world heaving with great good and great evil at the same time! There is a time for both ends of the spectrum to be lived (so other chapters in Ecclesiastes explain to us), and sometimes it happens at the same time!

New-thing Faith ... continued

Many are calling contemporary times a New Renaissance, particularly in the arts and science... some new life is emerging despite the terror, the fear and the grief. Childbirth is pretty messy and mothers will testify that you are only in control of particular aspects at various times in the process. Transition is critical.

Perhaps the Covid-cocoon time is one of global incubation into a new-thing world... incubation for better things and better ways to prevail? (Akin to the waters of birth, dark and murky providing passage to a life in the Light?)

With eyes of faith, we can see past the shocking and sad image in the middle of the bible, through the Gospel stories of Jesus and the founding of the church, the community living as a body with him as head and centre, to the promise of his return, ushering in a time of wonderful reconciliation and the restoration of the whole creation as described in the book of Revelation... where we overcome by the word of our testimony (stories of how Jesus made the Way for us to enjoy life and have what is broken restored/born anew) and the blood of the Lamb (the sacrifice) to accomplish and establish the Kingdom come amongst us! Through faith-coloured glasses, we see anew through the change-hungriness of life's messy situations into the real world in which God is the God of breakthrough... even if it's only the cracking of our cranial thoughts to allow in shafts of divine light to enable us to think afresh so that we may live afresh despite the testiness of situations in a world gone awry, spiralling out of control in cycles of disease and violence... except for the story we know and in which we may choose to participate. The Holy Spirit stokes the embers of our prayer life so that we are warmed in their glow, we can see how we may grow, and learn precious lessons which mature us. Real people doing real things in real time. Yes, spiritual maturity equips us to discern the truth from the "deep fake" many media streams spout to confuse and darken our perceptions... a maturity of know-how to prevent us drowning in the nonsense, how in good sense to witness to the Good News and be art-gifted bearers of it, instead of being blinded and misguided through the misinformation and disinformation of fake news and the fear of a world ruled by Artificial Intelligence.



Hunger and the mess lead us into what could be termed a test, so that the faithfulness and restorative power of God may be proven. We have a choice. Let's activate the measure of faith we have been given, so that we choose to be blessed... so that we may, in turn, be a blessing! So that we can activate revolution towards freedom and justice for all, a revolution orbiting around our Saviour of the World (in fact, the Saviour of the Cosmos, the entire Creation, as referenced in John 3:16, following the Nicodemus story mentioned previously).

I leave you with two poems that arose in my consciousness when contemplating the incredibly complex times in which we find ourselves living.

Be encouraged to live and stretch your faith to grow in word and deed, trusting in the Creator's design and ability to make all things right and new, to enable us to co-create a better future, even as we long for the time of complete Shalom, the matured peace of all creation, harmoniously functioning, all grown up and fulfilling its divine design and function! We are God's artwork, made in the divine image... go forth and create!

Ephesians 2:10 The Passion Translation (TPT)

10 We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!

Isaiah 43:18-19 The Passion Translation (TPT)

18 "Stop dwelling on the past.

Don't even remember these former things.

19 I am doing something brand new, something unheard of.

Even now it sprouts and grows and matures.

Don't you perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness

and open up flowing streams in the desert.

CaraMayan: Movement Meditation to Scripture - Mary Jones

Aims and effectiveness as a practice

CaraMayan started with the aim of providing a Christian alternative to Yoga and Tai Chi which have been steadily growing in the West as forms of exercise and meditation. In my experience of Hatha Yoga classes, Hatha Yoga being the first level of Yoga where the emphasis is on the exercise, I had found that although the teachers mostly concentrated on the physical there were often inserts at times during the class of the spiritual aspects which have Hindu or pre-Hindu roots. It may be possible to separate the two but in practice this doesn't necessarily happen. The aim of Yoga is to involve body and spirit and to grow beyond the practice of it being purely physical. I felt it was tragic that the Christian community has not widely developed similar practices which have substantial benefits. One of the main reasons for this was because of the Greek philosophy accepted into the early church which regarded the body as inferior to mind and spirit. This was in contrast to its Hebrew roots and biblical teaching. There have been Christians, however, who have taught Yoga, giving it a Christian intent. One example of a modern practice is Praise Moves which has put it together with scripture. However, there are Christians who feel doing Yoga or Tai Chi can be spiritually dangerous which was one of my main reasons for developing CaraMayan.

In CaraMayan I have used modern / contemporary dance as the technical base for the movements in the standing meditations along with biblical worship and creative movement to express the meaning of the words. For the Floor Exercise work I have also used movements from Pilates. Where some of these are similar to Yoga movements I have given different names that reflect the biblical image being used. The name CaraMayan derives from two Hebrew words meaning "to bow" and "well", "spring" or "fountain", suggesting that as we move in worship, the movement helps us to be in touch with the Holy Spirit dwelling within us and to activate the well of salvation and rivers of living water that Jesus spoke about in John 3 and 7. It aims to combine exercise with scripture in a way that expresses the scripture through movements that image the meaning and at the same time stretch and strengthen systematically different parts of the body. Certain movements such as roll-downs, lunges, side stretches, head and arm movements, footwork, leg lifts, plies and squats appear frequently and systematically, changing in their choreography to express the particular meaning of the scripture. Most of the movements are slow and sustained with a repetition of each movement phrase four times. This, along with emphasis on breathing patterns, helps to focus and slow the participant down into a more meditational state. The movements are all done to music, much of which has been composed specifically for the meditations. Music makes the combination of movement and scripture even more powerful, attractive and therapeutic. It takes practice to achieve a state where mind, body and spirit are equally involved but it can be achieved with regular repetition. This wholistic practice mirrors what Jesus quotes from Moses in loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk12:30) and Paul's writing in Rom.12:1 "to offer our bodies as living sacrifices ...which is our spiritual worship." This body worship can show itself in practical service but also in our times moving out our love and prayer in creative artistic expression. Below I have outlined the way in which CaraMayan involves the whole person:

BODY:

- Exercising of each part of the body and developing stretch, strength and coordination
- Breathing the correct way with the movements

MIND:

- Learning the scriptures and remembering the movements
- Checking the way the movements are being done both to best benefit the body and prevent injury and artistically to express the meaning with beauty and accuracy

SOUL:

- Feeling the emotions, meaning and artistry that are expressed in the words and movements
- Enjoying and responding to the tune, emotions and rhythm of the music
- Deciding to put the necessary discipline into learning and doing the meditations and carrying through on that decision

SPIRIT

- Using the meditation to open the spirit in praise, prayer and worship
- Receiving the spiritual benefits given in the scripture such as forgiveness, healing, strength, love

Research is showing the value of movement and music in learning and healing. As believers we know the power and importance of knowing scripture so putting all these together in a wholistic way can have great benefits to body, mind, soul and spirit .



it's a brave new world, baby!

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when the New Normal is less stormal
when the lockdown has run its course
when a new earth-world emerges
breathless
birthed dark-bloodied, but afresh

in that moment of uncertainty
following in-utero-like cocooning,
shut inside,
reforming, transforming, un-norming
transiting through Covid's canal,
arriving dormant and tinged blue,
greeting harsh-bright light of New
Day 1
will we survive to New Day 2?

IF we take breath to fill our lungs,
nourishment to heal, and precious
friendships keep,
we'll crawl out as new-thing creatures,
post our long-sad-suffer-crying sleep

will we need to learn to walk again?
how long will we have to crawl?
'til we, upright once more, lurch
forward
brave-feeling, but uncertainly swagger
towards dark-glass-dimly-sighted visage of what's in store

Oh, that familiar baby-proud smile
will yet dimple the face of our humanity!
as we baby-step into our collective new-view
and baby-like, unlearn, relearn, and learn anew!

we'll need to see many old things differently
we'll find new-wayed, just know-how things to do
we'll live kinder to ourselves and treat others to that kind of kindness, too
IF we remember age-old Wisdom personified and true
when we recall, re-embody Easter story and
blossom
changed, restored, and glory-ward renewed...



Internet illustration: Emerging Life

Lamentations 3:22-24 - Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."