

‘Building bridges’

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Thank you very sincerely for the invitation to be with you today and to share with you my thoughts about my life experience and the word of God.

Thank you also for the pleasant introduction. Having such an introduction in a church of all places touches my heart very much.

When I was approached to share this day with you, it appeared a very long way away. Only a few days ago, I wondered what I was going to talk about. Only then I realised how ‘Methodist’ I was. My mind swung back to several decades ago when I was a child of about 9 years of age. My primary school education for three years from that time in Ghana, my country of origin was at a Methodist School, and incidentally my class teacher at my first year at the school was the Methodist pastor’s wife – Mrs Gloria Etsiba of Blessed memory. I thank God for her life.

I had then just lost my mother Florence and the youngest addition to the family; my youngest brother was only six months old. Even at that age, I did appreciate the efforts of my struggling father who was looking for help, for a carer and solutions including schooling.

It appears to me now that the difficulties of the times opened up a special chapter in my life and also that of my siblings: opportunity to survive, to be inspired and to live meaningful lives. Today, my father remains the oldest columnist of a National Christian Newspaper at the age of 84 and perhaps the only living Ghanaian with the pioneering role in the establishment of many mission schools in rural Ghana over a period of 10 years post retirement. My sisters -one a catholic nun, the other a spiritual advisor at the World Vision. All others are in some role as a health worker, engineer and farmer.

We read in James 1:2-4

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

Until now, I had not questioned myself or my father why a catholic Christian, a church catechist as my father was at the time would risk the wrath of his parish by sending his own children or flock to another shepherd. A Methodist shepherd! It has come back to me now that my senior brother repeatedly said to me ‘your teacher is the Methodist pastor’s wife’. Indeed my father must have been looking for divine intervention and so it turned out to be.

I held onto every word of my teacher not knowing what I was going to do with them. She would lead religious knowledge classes with the enthusiasm no other teacher could match. The very first bible reading that I was asked to read was **Acts 3 verses 1-10** (today’s reading). What struck me most was verse 6. At that time, I was amazed how a man called Peter with nothing, no money, no silver, no gold, could do such a wonderful thing for the desperate disabled man.

Mrs Gloria Etsiba went on to teach me a poem during break time. Sadly, I have not been able to find the full text of the poem and the author. Maybe someone here will, but I never worried so much simply because I reserved the best parts in my heart. The part that interested me read as follows:

- *Care not what people may say. Do what you think is right.*

Perhaps this part meant a lot of freedom for me as a young boy. What followed was additional information which together with the previous lessons has become part of my spirituality. She went on-

'But whatsoever you may do, move not a step without God!

As I gently and unknowingly built up my search for the true meaning of life and spirituality, I was accompanied by my wife and young family on 7th July 2006 to visit my school mate doctor friend at an orthopaedic hospital in a regional capital in Ghana. What we saw on the wards brought about a search deep into our hearts and souls. It brought together all the 'Methodist teaching' that I had kept somewhere in the locker. We were a family okay financially, but we were not in a position to redress the situations which appeared to be so widespread in Ghana. My friend, Doctor Wilfred made a direct appeal for us to help. After all I was an orthopaedic surgeon working in England and my wife, a theatre scrub nurse – our training would come in handy.

As we drove down to the capital that late morning for our late flight to Accra, a certain discussion went on as to how we could help the situation. This was not the kind of challenge we were hoping to be introduced to by a friend.

We soon came to the realisation that Peter with no money could still change the life of a cripple. What Peter had to give out was more than money. It was some part of himself that he gave away. That something was solid faith in God. He had earned it by submitting himself to Jesus and Jesus as God was working through him. With that he could let a lame person walk. He could put right the physical weakness in man and by so doing the man could see God and sing His praises and testify to others.

Driven by these thoughts, we felt that we could rely on our faith and commitments to change things at least for a few. We suggested that the **Movement of Orthopaedic Trauma Experts Capable of supporting the Hospital** could be a little project we could run. Then my daughter said to me, you are talking about M.O.T.E.C. 'Daddy why don't we get help through a charity we should call MOTEC. So on the 7th day of July, 2006, the Charity Motec was born on an African road leading to Accra

God indeed works in mysterious ways and therefore it was no surprise how events unfolded that my wife and myself would be led by 'known forces' to help a 79 year old man with a 4 week old fractured neck of femur who had been admitted onto a women's hospital private room to rest and meet his fate in Accra. We performed a successful hip operation on this gentleman with tools and implant, a team of nurses and doctors mobilised from within the capital, the sources of which till today I call 'made from heaven'. This was a few hours before our flight to London that night. We could do things with Him! We could touch people in His name! We said to ourselves quietly on the flight. That man 6 years on still lives and has been performing dances waving a white

handkerchief in praise of God! God certainly lives everyday within you and me. And today Motec has grown with membership across the British Isles. We have people inspired to help with what they have. They give their time, their money and talent and indeed part of themselves working in remote parts of Ghana.

In the Northern part of Ghana where I visited in 2008, I saw for myself a ‘circle of life, deprivation and death’ when malnourished children would be rushed to hospital for treatment with food. About 30% of these would die in hospital or at home. If they were lucky to survive after about four to six months of feeding and hospitalisation with their mothers, they would go home into the same poor environment to meet another child or children who in the absence of their mothers for so long would suffer the same fate. These mothers tired from their ordeals are then forced to give up hope. Young lives are lost. The flowers in their gardens never see the light of the day.

Many opportunities are in this world for us to touch people with what God has giving us. Jesus provides us with a life full of guidance. He dedicates himself to touch those who need him even without being called. He shows us how to live and how to relate to Him and to one another. He demonstrates that life is full of challenges but there is always a way out for his followers.

I do say to people that *‘life is not worthwhile unless it is purposeful and made a difference to people we see as well as people we may never get to know’*. This is because Jesus says so with his live. For centuries his impact on our lives still lives.

I also tell my family that what would be the best thing to ever happen to me is for me to be able to say or think at all times including the time of my last breath-

–Thank you God for my life. I have used it to Your Full Glory’.

When Jesus says his last words-**‘It is finished’ John 19:29**. He means *‘mission accomplished’*. He means he has delivered what His Father asked him to do. Dedicated his life to serve man. Delivered us out of misery. Jesus has been very methodical in his teachings about love. This must surely be the answer I was searching for when my son Aaron at the age of three seeing somebody in pain asked me to my astonishment –‘Dad, why do we live!’

Are we prepared at any time of our lives to say ‘mission accomplished’. Have we tried to live purposeful lives that give live to those who need us?

The only way to meaningful lives is through Jesus. Psalm 100 tells us that *‘it is He who made us, and not we ourselves’*.

We also read from Mark 8:34-35 *if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel shall save it.*

At the penultimate hour, he was taunted. *‘You, who say you can destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself now!’* Mathew 27:29 Yet the Giver of life, denied Himself of life for our sake.

Charity, I believe, is part of self denial. This form of self denial is loaded with divine gain. As ***'he watereth shall be watered also himself'*** (Proverb 11:25). Through Faith, Hope and Charity (1st Cor 13:13) a divine bridge is established between finite man and Infinite God who makes all things possible.

Let us embrace the life of Jesus the Christ with joy for eternal life. Amen