

**Message: “Witnesses”****Here’s some news from our missionary in Ghana, Mozart Adevu.**

He shares this from Daniel Owusu Okyere. Daniel is a 21-year-old student. He’s also the third son of Peter Okyere, the Steward of the Methodist Church in Jeduako.

**Daniel has the following to say about his studies.**

“Since the outbreak of COVID-19, studying has become difficult for me. We have started E-learning but I have found it difficult to join my classmates because my Dad has to spend so much money in purchasing internet bundle for me to use on my phone to access the Virtual classes. There is no free Wifi here in Jeduako. I have realized how much undue pressure I have put on the budget of my family yet I should not miss any lectures as there are ongoing quizzes and the final examinations will be held soon. This pandemic has created so much disruption in my studies but I am grateful to God that no case has been registered so far in our community of Jeduako.”<sup>1</sup>

**Daniel spends time supporting his parents in establishing an organic vegetable garden.** His Dad, Peter Okyere, was a participant of the Farmer Field School in Organic agriculture held last year in Jeduako. That’s a school that we help support through Mozart’s sustainable agriculture program. Thank you for your vital and generous support.

**Jesus very last words on Earth were,** *“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8, CEB).

**Our partnership with Mozart, his family and ministry team is a wonderful example of one way we’re living into Jesus’ commission.** After all, that’s what he gives us. Jesus equips and prepares us to join him in the mission field. That’s what the last three years of his life were spent doing. That’s why he taught the beautifully powerful lessons in the upper room. The way it happened was through a miraculous birth, life, death, resurrection and now, as we learn in our reading for today, Jesus’ ascension.

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<sup>1</sup> *Second Missionary newsletter, Mozart Adevu, 2020*

**Jesus went back to heaven to be with God Almighty.** He took his place on the throne of heaven. That's where his power is greatest.

**We need Jesus on the throne of heaven.** That's how we receive the power to overcome the trials we face on earth. Without Jesus on the throne, we're relying on his lessons and stories. Most of all, we're relying on our own strength.

**I hope I'm not telling you anything you don't know, but we aren't up to it.** We don't have the strength to overcome the lies, corruption, evil and oppression of this world. No matter what defense we offer, there's always a counterpoint. No matter what evidence we find, someone will shout "fake news." No matter what our life experience tells us, there will come a point where we'll doubt.

**The bottom line is this: we can't save ourselves!**

We need the love and grace of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, seated at the place of honor. We need Jesus' pardon for the wrongs we've done. We need the love Jesus freely and willingly gives to us. His hand is always outstretched, waiting to receive ours. We need the healing that comes when Jesus sends the Spirit to touch our soul, healing us mind and body, and restoring us to the community of faith.

**Jesus' words are like those of a loving parent comforting a frightened child.** God says to us, "I know that you are afraid; but I also want you to know that I am here with you. I will not leave you. I will give you strength. I will give you help. I will hold you by the hand so that you will not fail."<sup>2</sup>

**With Jesus on the throne, we have a God who knows what it means to be human and to struggle with the daily challenges of life.**

We have a God who knows the pain of suffering and death first-hand. We have a God who knows what it's like not to have a home, to wonder when and where the next meal would come from, to have people curse you, plot against you, falsely accuse you, publicly humiliate you and take your life. We have a God who knows exactly how to intercede for us in the middle of our trials and temptations. Jesus knows the negative.

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<sup>2</sup> NACR Meditation, May 14, 2020

**Jesus on the throne recasts our understanding of the universe.**

Evil doesn't win. Good does. Darkness won't last forever. It gives way to the light. The truth will come out. Good shepherds are calling us.

**Jesus on the throne of heaven reshapes our identity as his children.**

We aren't strays, outcast, the leftovers, those whom the world has beaten down with nowhere else to turn. We are God's beloved children made in the divine image for good work. We are the members of a community based on faith, hope and love. We are overcomers. We can never be separated from the love of God, no matter who or what we face. We are called to be joint heirs of heaven, invited to receive the greatest gift of all: eternal life. When we are in a covenant relationship with Jesus, we're committed to him and he's committed to us. It's a relationship with great benefits.

**I don't know about you, but that gives me comfort.** I'm not just talking about feeling better. It's about being assured, confident in our faith, our trust in God. We know Jesus is who he claims to be at a deep level. It gives us joy and a sense that everything will be okay, no matter what we face. A pandemic can't take it away. Losing a job can't take it away. The breakup of a relationship can't take it away. Even death can't take it away. That's because Jesus' love and grace set us apart for something special, a full life now and for eternity in heaven.

**I wish I could sit across from each of you and share this message with you.** It's the good news the angels came to share. Jesus wants to give you a new life, new identity and a fresh start. All you have to do is believe with all your heart and mind and accept his love. When you do, you'll find your life is different. Your perspective shifts. You'll see things differently.

**Those of you who are believers remember those early days of faith.**

The world seemed more exciting. You felt more alive. You couldn't wait to see what God was going to do in your life each day. You saw evidence of God's presence all around you, in the world and lives of others. The same gift is now tempered by years, trials and experience. The love is still there. It's just deeper, richer and more confident.

**Jesus' last words on the mountain are important for you, no matter whether you are new to faith or more experienced in faith.** Jesus is telling you who you'll become if you follow him. Jesus gives us a mission. Did you hear it?

**Listen closely to Jesus' words,** *“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* Jesus calls us to be his witnesses. That's how he wants us to respond to his call. It's what he expects from us as our part in the relationship.

**What is a witness?** The word most often has legal implications. We think of a witness as a person who has seen and experienced something. They tell their story truthfully to others. This is evidence that others can use to decide on the truth for themselves.

**I don't normally focus on Greek or Hebrew words, but this one is important.** The Greek word for witness is μάρτυς (martus). It's where we get the word “martyr” from. It's not a coincidence. A martyr is a person who willingly endures suffering on behalf of a belief, principle or cause.<sup>3</sup> We often think of martyrs as those who die for their beliefs.

**Stephen, who was not one of the twelve apostles, is the first martyr** (see Acts 6). He was killed for caring for others, sharing his faith in spite of the opposition of others in the community. Before Stephen was killed, he was tried. That's where he shared his experience and faith in Jesus. Sadly, the authorities of the time didn't recognize Jesus for who he was and Stephen was killed. God gave Stephen a vision of Jesus in heaven right as he died.

**I'm not telling you this to scare you. Don't be afraid.**

**Jesus expects us to be his witnesses.** That's not an indication that you'll be persecuted, chased out of your home and killed. That's not what happens to most believers. However, it can happen. I've met people from other countries who have lost their homes, been disowned by their family and lost their jobs because they believe in Jesus. I know of people who have lost their lives because they wouldn't give up their faith in Jesus. They are examples of faith for us all.

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<sup>3</sup> See [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

**Jesus invites us to be in a relationship with him.** It's a covenant relationship, a spiritual marriage. You know the words, it's "...until death do us part." Jesus promises to be with us every step of our life, even to death and what lies beyond.

**What Jesus expects from us is that we'll be faithful.** We'll do our part. We'll share our faith story and experience of God. And we'll do so **NO MATTER WHAT!** We'll do it in a loving way. We don't harm others. But we won't give up. No matter what we have to endure, we'll keep on sharing the message of Jesus' love, grace and forgiveness every day of our lives.

**That means sharing our faith.** We share our faith at home. We share our faith with our neighbor. We share our faith at work. We share our faith at the salon, supermarket, mall, coffee shops and all the places we go. We share our faith with all the people we meet – young, old and middle-aged, regardless of their country of origin, language, custom or beliefs. We share our faith regardless of our feelings. The Holy Spirit will prompt you when the time is right. Trust God.

**Be prepared for the worst but get busy and act by faith.**

Don't be afraid. Tell others about Jesus. The whole book of Acts is a demonstration of the lives and faith of the early church. It wasn't easy. They made mistakes. But God did a good work through them. They're an example to us.

**It's our turn.** Let's show our new children, youth and new graduates what a full, confident life as one of Jesus disciples is like. Then let's show our community what it means and what we can do. Finally, let's lift our eyes and look across the nation and across the world. God has good work prepared for you to do, as a member of Corona UMC and the community of Jesus' followers.

**Join us on the path. Together we can change the world, one house at a time.**

## **Remember & Celebrate Those Who Serve**

*Light candle on table*

**Almighty God of the living and the dead, we give thanks to you:**

For those who blessed our spiritual journey, whose lives have empowered us, whose influence is a healing grace...

**Let us not forget.**

For the dear friends and family members whose faces we see no more, but whose love is with us forever...

**Let us not forget.**

For the teachers and companions of our childhood and youth, and for the members of the household of faith who worship you now in heaven...

**Let us not forget.**

For those who sacrificed themselves, our brothers and sisters who have given their lives for the sake of others, running toward danger when we would run away ...

**Let us not forget.**

For those who served the greater good, seeking your kingdom with boldness and courage, speaking your name with love ...

**Let us not forget.**

For those who served in the armed forces, laboring so we might be free

**Let us not forget.**

For those who care for the health and livelihoods of others, those whose work is essential for our wellbeing, we lift them up with love ...

**Let us not forget.**

For the families of all who serve, have served and those who have given their lives, may they know your peace and purpose in their lives ...

**Let us not forget.**

May we be dedicated to working for a world where labor is rewarded, fear dispelled, and the nations made one,

**O Lord, save your people and bless your heritage. Day by day we praise you and worship your name, for ever and ever. Amen.**

*I invite you to light a candle and speak aloud or silently, the names of those you honor. You can do so now, later or on Memorial Day.*

*Let us pray silently together ...*

## **Reflection & Prayer**

“Lord Christ, even though we had faith enough to move mountains, without love what would we be? You love us. Without your Spirit alive in our hearts, what would we be? You love us. Taking everything upon yourself, you open for us a road to faith, to trust in God, who wants neither suffering nor human distress. Spirit of Christ, Spirit of compassion, Spirit of praise, your love for each one of us will never disappear.”<sup>4</sup> In Jesus’s name we pray. Amen.

## **Opportunities to Serve**

- **INVITE-CONNECT-ENGAGE**
  - Call someone and listen to them in a non-anxious way
  - Pray for them and let them know you did
  - Ask how you can help and how they can get involved
- **Engage:** volunteer to help make Welcome Kits for the Los Angeles Housing Authority. They go to the homeless and those who need temporary housing. Call the office if you’re interested.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.taize.fr/en\\_article5806.html](https://www.taize.fr/en_article5806.html)

**John 17:1-11 (CEB)**

When Jesus finished saying these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son can glorify you. You gave him authority over everyone so that he could give eternal life to everyone you gave him. This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I shared with you before the world was created.

“I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

“I’m praying for them. I’m not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. I’m no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I’m coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one.

**Acts 1:6-14 (CEB)**

As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, “Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?”

Jesus replied, “It isn’t for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

After Jesus said these things, as they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going away and as they were staring toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood next to them. They said, “Galileans, why are you standing here, looking toward heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem - a sabbath day's journey away. When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James, Alphaeus' son; Simon the zealot; and Judas, James' son - all were united in their devotion to prayer, along with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.