



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society February 2022

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**Kung Fu Panda Doesn't Buy Green Bananas,
and Pharaoh Shouldn't**

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

At the beginning of the movie Kung Fu Panda, the evil villain Tai Lung is bound in an underground prison. However, when it is time to select the next Dragon Warrior, Master Shifu sent additional security to the prison to make sure that Tai Lung couldn't and wouldn't escape because there's no way they could let *him* be the next Dragon Warrior... obviously... because, well you know, he's a bad guy. So it makes sense to have extra security, right? What happens though is that in all of the stress and panic to put extra security in place, a feather falls from a messenger and floats all the way down to Tai Lung's cell, where he uses it to pick the lock and begin his escape.

What's the lesson? When we act out of fear, sometimes we cause the very thing that we seek to prevent. It's not just a lesson from the movies, in fact I wouldn't be surprised if the writer of Kung Fu Panda was familiar with Biblical stories because we find it in the Word too. Pharaoh wanted to prevent the Children of Israel from becoming too numerous and powerful, so acting out of fear, he places the order to have the Hebrew baby boys killed. Pharaoh is smart here, right? He's not nice or good, but he is being prudent, planning ahead. Actually the NIV and NKJV translations both say Pharaoh dealt "shrewdly" (Exodus 1:10) with the Israelites. It doesn't work of course, because it's Pharaoh's order to kill the baby boys that makes it so that Moses' birth mother places him in a basket in the Nile which of course leads to Moses being raised by Pharaoh's daughter.

So despite what seemed like a pretty good strategic, prudent, shrewd move by Pharaoh and Master Shifu, they caused the very thing they tried to prevent. Ouch. Insert face plant here. That's a tough lesson. I think you can get a similar lesson from King Herod as well. He goes on a "kill the baby boys" spree too, and while he doesn't cause Jesus' birth, it does seem that his action pushes Mary and Joseph to Egypt... which is where the Lord wanted and needed to be anyway. The prophecy was already written, the outcome was really never in doubt, so no matter what Herod did it wasn't going to work.

Which leaves me to wonder why it is that we work so hard to control outcomes when we should be very clear that we can't? This shouldn't be hard, right? This should be an easy teaching... just sit back, relax because the Lord is in control! We should greet this teaching like it is our long lost lover who has just returned home from war! Yet that's not the response I get when I put it out there. A few weeks ago I did a sermon titled, "Green Bananas," and if you weren't there – or could it be, you have forgotten since then – the point of the sermon was that we should live in the moment and not worry about tomorrow. As I expected, I got some pushback on this message, but to me the Bible is very clear about

this. Jesus sends out His disciples telling them not to take extra clothes or money. No need to plan ahead. Oh, and by the way, when you're arrested, that is, when that bad thing actually does happen, don't worry about that either as you'll be given the words to say. There are plenty of other teachings to back this up, so just keep on keepin' on.

Again I ask, why is this message so hard for us? I'd suggest that we resist it because it means that we need to relinquish control in our lives to an extent that we are really uncomfortable with. We're happy to nod our heads in agreement when we are taught to trust the Lord, that Providence is in the least of all things, but when those broad teachings get focused down like a ray of sunlight through a magnifying glass to some specific point in our life, they can get mighty painful. "What, you mean *I* have to not worry about money/health/children/politics?" Correct.

"But, but, but... what about my retirement? If I don't worry about money, how can I afford retirement? If I don't worry about my health I'll get ill, or my body won't function properly." Also true. I think this is one of those things where what the Lord is teaching us is that we have to make the right decisions each day and trust that they'll turn out well in the long term. So for example, eat healthy today, get some exercise today, and then you just have to accept whatever happens from there. Don't go around wondering if you're going to have a heart attack, get cancer, or whatever. You've done what you're supposed to do, you've sowed the field, and so the rest is just going to be what it is going to be. If it actually is a "bad" thing, then trust that the Lord will bring something good out of it. This is a fundamental teaching of the Bible: TRUST THE LORD. There's an old quote that goes like this: duty is ours, consequences belong to God.

We get ourselves into a lot of trouble when we try to control outcomes. Humans have been trying to do this for a long, long time. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, so they ate the forbidden fruit. The tower of Babel was constructed because once again people wanted to overthrow God and be in control. Babel and Babylon are a recurring problem throughout the Bible, and as much as the Writings tell us that they are a symbol for the evil control that the Catholic church exercised over its people, they are also a symbol of how we use religion to justify controlling others as well as tipping the scale in favour of condemning truth over love in our own life.

I'm not saying we need to give up all of our efforts to create positive outcomes, but I do think most of us would do well to give the "live in the moment" teachings more weight than we currently do. I know that giving up control is really hard for people to accept. It took a while for the disciples to actually take this message and really let it sink in. After all, we know that just before Jesus was arrested that they were ready to fight for Him and prevent that from happening. Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan!" Why? Because the disciples saw all the good that Jesus was doing in the natural world with His teaching and healing ministry, so they wanted to take a "prudent" or "smart" approach to the situation and prevent His death. The reality was that what was about to happen needed to happen. To be taken to the next level spiritually, pain and suffering was required. We know this to be true, and yet we still do everything we can to avoid it.

In the song “Green Bananas,” the writer didn’t buy green bananas because he didn’t plan that far ahead. He just rolled with the waves, went with the flow, living each day as it comes. Pharaoh would have been wise to do the same. If he’d just trusted a good process, dealt honourably with the Israelites, and seen how God blessed Egypt through them, he wouldn’t have let fear take over as the guiding principle and Egypt might have been a model society much like the kingdoms of Saul, David and Solomon. Instead, being guided by fear and a desire to control the outcome brought about the very destruction of Egypt that Pharaoh was trying to prevent.

After the resurrection the disciples finally got it, and they went out preaching the Gospel and changed the world. Astute readers I’m sure will point out that things didn’t turn out well for the disciples in the physical world. Paul was beheaded. Peter and Andrew were crucified. Thomas died when pierced through with the spears of four soldiers. James was stoned and then clubbed to death. The others also had an unpleasant fate, and in fact it was only John who lived to die of old age. People will do ANYTHING these days to avoid a death like that. Are we supposed to though? I admit, it’s not much of an advertisement for following the teachings of Jesus. But you know what? They certainly lived a life free of fear and worry, basically operating contrary to the world where we value physical life more than anything else. They modelled for us how Christians are supposed to live, and in doing so, they started the church and changed the world.

I think the same principles are still in play, and that we should follow the disciples’ example. Want to grow the church? Well, maybe we need to stop being so much like everybody else. Are we being like Master Shifu, Pharaoh and others, doing what we deem is prudent or shrewd in planning for the future? Yet in acting like everybody else are we inadvertently bringing about that which we fear the most? I would encourage you instead to actually live a life different to the mainstream, and by that I mean a life free of worry and fear. I think you’ll find that’s a life that others will admire and aspire to, and best of all, your bananas will always be ripe.

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Spiritual Growth/Journey Program Starting Feb 6

Let me sum up my philosophy of life in one sentence: your life will be better if you orient your life around the teachings in the Writings. I’ve found no better system. But let’s be honest, you’ve not completely embraced all the teachings. You’re not a celestial angel yet. I get it. Life is busy, so you take short cuts to make it through the day. When you’re choosing what it is that you skip, one of the first things that gets passed over is our spiritual practice. “It’s not urgent” we think. Is a glass of water urgent? You can skip it for a bit, but at some point it is urgent. Same with spirituality. We need lots of it, and we need it daily.

To help all of us with this, we’ll be starting the **“Pause: Make Space for God”** spiritual growth program on **Sunday February 6**. As usual this program has a Monday evening at 7:30pm discussion group. This program will run for a total of 7 weeks, so it will finish on

the 20-21st of March. The intention is that we'll have a real, stand alone harvest service on the 27th, and we'll still have an extra week before Palm Sunday.

As for the program, here's a list of the weekly topics:

- How Does God Speak to Me?
- Why Did God Create Me?
- Who is Jesus and How Does He Relate to My Life?
- How Does the Lord Work in My Life?
- What Does the Lord Want from Me?
- How Do I Follow the Lord?
- How Does the Lord Want Me to Serve Others?

Some of these are pretty basic topics, but it really is important to master these fundamental concepts. If you're interested in joining in, either in person or by zoom, let me know so that I make sure I have enough workbooks for everybody. They are free, so money is not an excuse!

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Road Rally Recap

We recently hosted our first Road Rally... what is a Road Rally you ask? Think scavenger hunt in a car. We had about 40 people divided into 12 teams that followed a series of clues to four check points. At each check point they had to complete a task... take a photo, answer a question, roll a Yahtzee, throw lawn darts... but they were also given a list of photos to take with Flat Emanuel (cut out of Emanuel Swedenborg) with varying point value.



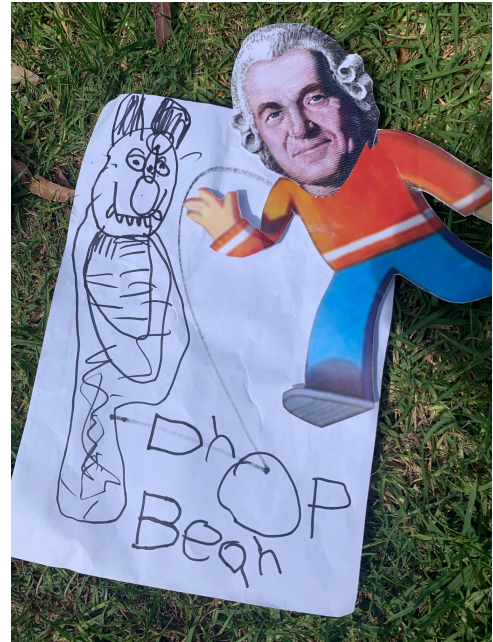
For example, a photo with Flat Emanuel with a dinosaur was 10 points, but a photo with the team being attacked by a Drop Bear was 30 points.



20 points for delivering a copy of "Temptations" to a street library in Sutherland Shire.



25 points with a buried team member in sand
Anna Heldon at Kurnell.



After a few hours of driving around and getting photos, we had two teams that had set themselves apart from the rest. **Team 2**, with **Dylan, Michelle, Aneira and Azalea** finished second with 396 points, but they were edged slightly by **Team 1** with **Jenn, Zach and Joe** accumulating 411 points.



The Robson Family from left to right: Michelle, Azalea, Dylan and Aneira
Drop bear picture (see close up above) drawn by 4 year old Aneira



Zach with Flat Swedenborg and a Vintage VW Beetle - 10 points!

At the end of the Rally a free lunch was provided at the Audley Dance Hall in the Royal National Park. We received a lot of positive feedback for this event, and we are really happy that so many of you were able to participate and have a good time. We are especially grateful to the Lindlundh Foundation for funding it and Todd and Owen for organising it.

Birthdays

January: Margaret Heldon (9th), Kerry Lockhart (24th), Kaye Macfarlane (30th)

February: John Hicks (9th) and Mike Lockhart (11th)

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