

“A Bite Of Life”

by Grace Johnson, Lay Speaker

Imagine no Malaria

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Will you pray with me? May the words of my mouth and the meditations in all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, Oh God.

Happy Father's Day Dads. Last year I shared with you some laughter, a few tears and fun along with some scripture. This year I am not long on levity because today's subject is so very important. Just know Dads that we love you and hope you have a really great day.

John Wesley once heard about a man in his community named Tom who was destitute and desperate. Wesley wrote him a comforting letter of hope which read in part, "Dear Tom: I pray that life will soon be easier for you and your family, remember Psalm 37: 3 which says "Trust in the Lord. . . and verily you shall be fed." With this letter Wesley included 10 shillings, a sizeable amount of money in those days.

Not long after that John Wesley received this gracious reply from the man: "Dear Mr. Wesley; I have often been struck by the beauty of the scripture passage you quoted. But I understand even better now how it is that the Lord feeds the hungry. Thank you for your much needed gift."

It is often not enough to pray and offer words of heavenly benediction for those in need, we must act. That is why we are here today to act.

When we stand before the throne of God and are asked why we think we should be in the presence of the Lord, the offering we put in the plate, or the songs of praise we sing, or the prayers we pray will not help much if we neglect the service that Christ has called us to perform. We ask how can we help. What can I do I am only one person.

Mother Theresa once said, "I never look at the masses as my responsibility, I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed only one person at a time. So you begin with one. If I didn't pick up that one person, I wouldn't have picked up 42,000. My whole work is only a drop in the ocean but if I didn't put the drop in, the ocean would be one drop less."

Suppose every person in the California, Nevada Conference gave up their daily Latte or pack of smokes, or other little pleasure. About \$5.00 worth of sacrifice Just for one day. There are over 80,000 members of this conference. I am really awful at math but I think that is about \$400,000. For just giving up one little pleasure for just one day. No it won't cure the problem

but multiply that by all of the United Methodists in the nation and what happens then? I'll have to get Ron Malone to figure that one out for me.

Dr J. Howard Olds once told his congregation that the fledgling church in Corinth was having trouble getting along, they found it easier to love in theory than in reality. So Paul wrote chapter 13 of his first letter to them explaining to them about what real love was. One of the most beautiful pieces of poetry ever written. Eugene Peterson puts it this way: ***Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut. Love doesn't have a swelled head. Love doesn't force itself on others, it isn't always "Me first." It doesn't fly off the handle; it doesn't keep score of the sins of other; it doesn't revel when others grovel. It takes pleasure in the flowering of truth. It puts up with anything and trusts in God always.***

That's what loving one another radically is all about, because when it is all over and we are standing before that throne, the only thing that will really matter is did we live our lives for God? Did we love others? Remember that is part of the greatest commandment **Matthew 22:37-40** "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Mother Theresa was asked how she could minister to people with such horrid illnesses, and she replied, "I just pretend that they are Jesus." What a wonderful attitude. Every time we do something that helps those who cannot help themselves, we are ministering to Jesus.

We must realize every good act is important. Not that we are accepted by God because of our goodness. Most certainly not. We are accepted by God because of God's grace. But good acts are the outgrowth of a life which is connected to Christ. A good tree bears good fruit. And part of the fruit we bear is service to others in the name of our Lord.

E. Stanley Jones a Methodist Theologian once told of a Brahmin convert who began to live at the Ashram Dr. Stanley and others had founded in India. The Brahmins were drawn from the upper caste in India. Everyone in the ashram was expected to participate in the community chores, including cleaning of latrines. At that task the former Brahmin stopped short, claiming the job was beneath him. When Dr. Jones insisted that in Christ there are no unsuitable jobs and those converted to his Lordship should have no trouble cleaning latrines, the Indian responded, "Brother Stanley, I'm converted, but not that far." That is sort of our problem we are converted but not that far.

In this country we don't think much about Malaria, it has been pretty much eradicated since the 1940's. There are only about 1500 cases each year now. During the Second World War my cousin Don, a marine, served in the Pacific Theatre and contracted Malaria on Guadalcanal.

During his lifetime every so often he would experience a relapse and suffer until it was brought under control. The headaches, the fever and chills. I can remember him sweating and shaking the chills it was scary for me as a child to see this. He was able to get the treatment he needed and the drugs were readily available, yet many times through the years he was suffering.

Every year a million children in Sub-Saharan Africa and other areas of the world die from a small mosquito bite. We have all heard of the program "Nothing But Nets" it is a wonderful program that distributes nets permeated with insecticide. This is a worthwhile program that we have participated in for several years, and many, many lives have been saved by it.

While the nets are a wonderful, effective part of eradicating this preventable disease, medication, spraying, education, adequate drugs and Doctor's are also a very necessary part. Once a person is infected it is important to get treatment quickly. There are several medications but they are strain specific. There is not one cure that fits all. The infected must get to a Doctor quickly to find the correct treatment. It is not like jumping in the car and running over to the Doctor's office for a quick visit. In Africa people are most likely to treat health conditions with traditional healers and practices that may or may not be effective.

Today we are here to raise your awareness to this terrible plague. It is more than a dreadful disease that infects 300 to 500 million people worldwide each year. It is a cause and a result of poverty. In Africa alone there is net loss of about 12 billion dollars every year because of the loss of productivity due to illness and death. Malaria accounts for 40 percent of the public health expenditure, 50 percent of all outpatient visits, and 30-- to 50 percent of inpatient admissions. A child dies every 45 seconds of this curable disease. That is one thousand nine hundred and twenty children every twenty-four hours. That doesn't include the rest of the people infected and unable to get the care they need.

The front line of the United Methodist church's fight against Malaria is a tightly knit, highly trained group of people who go out to the bush or rural regions to educate about the measures against malaria. They teach the people environmental clean-up. They also teach the people the proper use of nets. You see using a net doesn't make natural sense to rural Africans. It takes a neighbor, a trusted friend, someone they know to convince them that the nets will keep the mosquito's away at night. Because mosquitoes only bite at night.

The church has worked with hospitals, clinics, and missions in Africa to combat Malaria for over 160 years. In 2007/2008 The United Methodist Church was invited by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to join them its effort to eliminate diseases of poverty through the Global Health Initiative.

William H. Gates Sr. chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation spoke before the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. He expressed confidence and respect for

the United Methodist Church and reminded the church of the words of John Wesley; "Almost 300 years ago, your founder John Wesley, explained moral implications of what now is . . . called globalization. Wesley's statement 'I look on all the world as my parish,' describes our mutual responsibility. The fight against malaria is going to take a firm commitment to John Wesley's idea. You are 12 million people armed with the conviction that all the world is your parish. That makes you the most powerful weapon there is against malaria."

This then is our mission, the five year mission of the United Methodist Church. We are determined to put an end to Malaria by 2015. This is what John Wesley called us to do. This is what Jesus is calling us to do. To serve the least as we would serve him.

What it takes is money. We have here a bed net with pins on it. You are invited to pin a bill or a check on the net and help us do our part to eradicate this terrible disease. To keep the front-line fighters, the healthcare workers out there. To really put an end to this disease. I want you to know that the youth of our conference raised nearly \$8000 dollars while I was at conference. Remember we are called, to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. That is what is says in Micah 6: 8

This is our heritage people. That is what we who are called Methodists, are supposed to do. To live out the great commandment from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And the people said Amen!



Parts of this sermon are from the United Methodist No More Malaria website.

Malaria is a parasite that is transmitted to humans through the bite of the female *anopheles mosquito*, which feeds at night. The parasite enters the bloodstream, multiplies in the liver and returns to the bloodstream, attacking red cells.

Early symptoms of malaria are fever, chills, headache and nausea. Left untreated, malaria causes convulsion, coma, organ failure and death.

We are making a difference. Today a child dies every 45 seconds from malaria, just a short time ago, it was every 30 seconds. The clock is slowing down. The number of deaths each year has dropped from 1 million to 800,000.

While malaria has largely been eradicated in the U.S., between 350 million and 500 million people are still infected each year, mostly in Africa.

Malaria is a disease of poverty. It severely affects those who cannot afford treatment or have limited access to health care, leading to a detrimental effect on attendance at

workplaces and schools. Malaria is both preventable and treatable. There is currently a plan to eliminate malaria in our lifetime.

Insecticide-treated mosquito nets are a simple, cost-effective way to prevent malaria, but nets are only part of the solution. To overcome malaria, we must continue to support the most effective prevention methods, while also improving education about the disease, establishing community-based malaria-control programs, conducting communications outreach through radio, and revitalizing hospitals and clinics to improve treatment across the African continent.

Social holiness has always been a hallmark of we who are United Methodists, John Wesley encouraged his followers to live like Jesus-to reach out to those who are on the fringes of society, heal them and send them back to their community for a greater good.

We are in this fight, and we will win it. We will save millions of children's lives, making sure these faces see a bright future.



The report in The New York Times sounds like an episode of *Cold Case*, but this one is thousands of years old. It involves a celebrity for most of us--the boy pharaoh of Egypt, King Tutankhamen in the fourteenth century B.C..

Even though some scientists speculated that foul play was involved in his death, DNA evidence shows that he was not immune from the parasites carried by the *anopheles mosquito* that infested the Nile valley. Scientists have recently determined that malaria was probably a primary agent in his death at age nineteen. King Tut was frail and lame, and a severe bout of malaria, combined with a degenerative bone disorder, most likely caused his death. The scientists report that several other mummies also showed DNA evidence of the presence of the malaria parasite *Plasmodium falciparum*.

The New York Times also reports that malaria had a tremendous impact on ancient Rome and that Attila the Hun may have turned back from sacking Rome because of the fever raging there. Archaeologists have found evidence of several epidemics of malaria during Rome's decline from greatness.

Symptoms of malaria are described in ancient Chinese medical writings dating from 2700 BC and by Hippocrates in ancient Greece, where the disease was widely recognized by the fourth century B.C.. A Sanskrit medical writing called *Susruta* describes the disease and attributes it to insect bites.



Watching a small child die from malaria is a horrific experience. First come the headache, tiredness, weakness in the joints and general malaise, followed by a very high fever. Then the fever's effect on the brain causes the child's muscles to jerk, just before the end. Hear the words of a boy has seen this too often.

Twelve year old Charles Ssali, a soccer player and malaria survivor from Uganda, visited New York City in November, 2009, as an ambassador for "United Against Malaria", an Initiative to provide universal access to mosquito nets and malaria medicine in Africa by the end of 2010. The Initiative was to promote awareness of the campaign at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. Ssali, who is the leading under-12 years of age, goal scorer in Uganda says: "I love soccer and I hate Malaria... I live in Uganda where I love to play soccer with my friends, but sometimes they're too sick to play. I hope my global journey will help soccer fans all over the world understand this disease that affects my hometown and many others in Africa.

The net we have here is a symbol of how we can help. There are pins on it. If you feel moved to add your help to eradicate this terrible scourge, you can pin your dollars or a check to the net and the money will be added to dollars from all over the country to hopefully put an end to the deaths of children.