Adventist Heritage

The return

Have you noticed something missing at your church for the past four weeks? It's approximately 27 centimetres long, 20.5 centimetres wide and 24 pages thick. It's colourful, informative and inspirational. It appeared 26 times in churches across the South Pacific last year and, starting this Sabbath, it will be back another 26 times in 2013.

Know what it is? Here's a clue: it's a six letter word that starts with the letter "R". And it's not "rabbit".

Resilience

What comes to mind when you think of dandelions? Their striking colour? The joy of blowing their seeds into the wind?
The flowers really are a beautiful symbol of summer. But, as James Standish found out after mowing his lawn, they’re also a symbol of resiliency.

The language of Jesus

People often think about what Jesus might have looked like. But have you ever wondered about what language He spoke?

The truth about YOLO

If you didn't already know, apparently "You Only Live Once". YOLO has become an immensely popular catch phrase, especially among teenagers and young adults. But is it a good motto to live by?
I mowed the lawn two weeks ago. Nothing remarkable, I suppose, but I always feel a sense of pride when the job is done. Leisa inevitably takes a look, and states affirmingly how tidy it all is, as I stand with my hands on my hips surveying my morning’s work. And then, sometime later in the day, I find a way to mention my rather monumental achievement a couple more times to her.

I don’t do many practical things so you have to cut me just a little slack if my grass cutting victory laps seem a little disproportionate.

But today I looked out of the window, and remarkably, the backyard was covered with bright yellow dandelions on stalks roughly 30cm long. Somehow, in two weeks, my total subjugation of our backyard has been wiped away, and nature again has achieved the upper hand—in a very peaceful, quiet, sunny sort of way.

I suppose this Sunday I’ll be out there again wreaking ecological carnage in the name of civilisation, and feeling rather smug for doing so. But I have to admit I do admire those dandelions. They have such in-built resistance, such determination—an unstoppable resilience.

Successful people are like that. Churchill, Pasteur, Thatcher, Edison, and so on, all had one thing in common—the willingness to take a hit and yet keep moving forward. It’s not that they didn’t have their share of challenges and even periods of despondency. As if the Luftwaffe was not challenge enough for anyone, Churchill was also personally prone to bouts of deep depression that he referred to as his “black dogs”. Some argue that his “black dogs” allowed him to perceive the depths of evil at the heart of Nazism, and prepared him for a long, dark struggle. Whether or not that’s true, the significance of his achievements are proportional to the challenges he faced.

Similarly, the most gripping stories of the Bible all involve people overcoming the most remarkable setbacks. There’s Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Daniel, all of whom began life well, fell to the lowest depths and then, by
the grace of God, rebounded in remarkable ways. David’s life is a series of compelling story arcs. And, of course, the most astonishing story arc of all is that of Jesus—beginning in heaven, thrown down into poverty and sin, apparently ending in abject failure and tragedy, only to be resurrected the Conqueror—and that is only the beginning. Hollywood calling Christ’s life “The Greatest Story Ever Told” is a bit of an understatement.

We are all, in a way, the protagonists in our own stories. And now, here we find ourselves at the start of a new year with a chapter yet to be written. For many, I suppose, it will be a year of relatively smooth sailing. Not the stuff of gripping narrative, I’m afraid, and yet what we may all rationally hope and pray for. For others, it will be a year of enormous challenge—maybe even almost unspeakable tragedy. And there is no way to know into which group we’ll fall, irrespective of our prudence, capacity or preparation, as Ecclesiastes 9:11 makes starkly clear:

“I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.”

While we can’t control what comes our way this year, generally we can control how we respond. It’s interesting to hear two different people who have gone through similar trials citing them as the reason they either lost their faith or drew closer to God, embraced life more fully or gave up hope, innovated or stagnated. In large part, it is our choice.

I’m looking out my back window at those happy dandelions. This Sunday they will face all the desolation I can wreak on them. But I will no sooner finish the job than they will muster all their might and begin reaching for the sun again. And my best efforts to destroy them will have only spread their tiny seeds all over the yard ensuring only a bigger crop next time around.

That’s the power of resilience.

*James Standish is RECORD editor for the South Pacific Division.*

**Labels:** Resistance, Determination, Resilience, New Year

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Comment
The language of Jesus

By Eliezer Gonzalez

Isn’t it great when you find someone who speaks your language when you’re travelling abroad? It’s then that you realise just how much you take your language for granted, and how deeply ingrained our language is within each of us. In fact, linguists tell us that our language is very closely related to our culture and the way we think. And we also know that language is “not just words”. When we speak, we actually change how the world is experienced around us. That’s the power of words.

Wayne Stiles writes, in a chapter that is aptly titled “Disappointed With Perfection”, that “[g]rowing up, I had always imagined [Jesus] with a cool British accent—speaking English.”¹ This was because of British actor Robert Powell’s portrayal of Jesus in the 1977 mini-series Jesus of Nazareth. But, of course, everyone knows that this is wrong because we know that Jesus spoke English with an American accent, don’t we? At least that’s the impression you would get from the Hollywood portrayals of Jesus.

So what language did Jesus really speak?

Sometimes we get the impression that Jesus mainly spoke Hebrew, the language of Moses and the prophets, but that was not the case. Since the gospels were written in Greek, it is easy to get the impression that the main language that Jesus spoke was Greek, but that's not right either. By the time of Jesus, and since the return of the Jews from Persian captivity, the common language that was spoken throughout the Eastern Mediterranean was Aramaic.

We can see this in the fact that when the gospel writers wanted to quote the exact words that Jesus said, they wrote down what He said in Aramaic, or at least how the Aramaic would have
sounded, using Greek letters. An example of this is found in Mark 14:36, where Jesus in Gethsemane calls His Father “Abba” (“daddy”). A little later we are told that “about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice [from the cross] saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Here, in this most climactic yet intimate moment of His life, we see Jesus crying out to His Father in Aramaic.

But who says that Jesus spoke only one language? We also know that Jesus probably read and spoke Hebrew. When Jesus went to the synagogue in His home town of Nazareth and opened the scroll of the book of Isaiah, the scroll was probably written in the Hebrew language. Although by the time of Jesus Hebrew had been largely replaced by Aramaic as the everyday language of the people, it had not been lost. Hebrew was still the language of the Jewish faith, and so it was the language of the synagogue and the language of the temple. The physical evidence for this is that most of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written in Hebrew. The people must have understood Hebrew because they listened to the Old Testament being read in the synagogues or when they read it for themselves. So Jesus, the greatest Prophet of all, could in fact speak the language of the prophets of the Old Testament.

Another interesting question is: how much Greek did Jesus know? The province of Judea, and indeed the whole Mediterranean world, was thoroughly influenced by Greek culture by the time of Jesus. There were Greek cities throughout the empire, and regions around Judea were no exception. Throughout the Mediterranean, Greek was the language of everyday business and trade, as well as the language of intellectual discussion.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, where He worked for most of His adult life as a carpenter. Back then, Nazareth was only a tiny village, very different to the large city that it is today. If you’ve ever lived in a small town, you know that now and then you need to visit some larger cities. The closest city to Nazareth was Sepphoris, which was probably Greek-speaking, and it was only 8 kilometres away. The large Greek-speaking city of Tiberias was 32 kilometres away.

It is almost impossible to think that as Jesus plied His trade that He didn’t do business with the larger cities around Nazareth, or with travellers who were passing through and stopped by His workshop on their way to and from these cities. To do that, He had to speak Greek. We know that during His life, Jesus travelled many times from Galilee to Jerusalem. Along the way, He would have passed at times through the large and imposing Greek city of Sythopolis (the ancient Beth Shean). In fact, even today, the site of ancient Sythopolis still has some of the most impressive ruins in all of Israel. The Gospels also tell us that Jesus spoke with a Roman centurion and with Pilate, and it's reasonable to assume that these conversations were in Greek.

The fact that the apostles Matthew and John wrote in Greek suggests that they knew at least some Greek when they were with Jesus. Although it's possible that they learned Greek only later in life, it's hard to imagine that they did not know any Greek at all earlier on. After all, they were from Galilee, which was a cosmopolitan region dotted with Greek-speaking cities. We have the evidence before us in the writings of the apostle John; his Greek is pretty rough, with plenty of traces of his Semitic background. This suggests that John was not writing in his mother-tongue.
The writers of the New Testament quote from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the “Septuagint”, quite often. Although we would not be wrong in thinking that this is because they were writing to mainly Greek-speaking believers, it's interesting that in Mark 7:6–8, Jesus quoted the Greek Septuagint rather than the Hebrew of Isaiah 29:13. If the disciples knew some Greek, and if Jesus quoted the Greek translation of the Old Testament, then it's reasonable to believe that Jesus knew some Greek as well.

So what other languages did Jesus speak? Because we are already seeing that Jesus did not just speak one language; He spoke many languages.

Jesus spoke the language of children and He spoke the language of the wise. He spoke the language of the street-people and the language of the wealthy. He spoke the language of the wind and of the waves, and He spoke the language of the Spirit and the language of life. He spoke a language that the deaf could hear and that the mute could speak. He spoke a language that made the demons flee and the heavens rejoice, because He spoke the language of healing and the language of grace.

Neither the cross nor the grave were able to silence His voice, and the doubt and scepticism of the critics never will. Jesus is still speaking today. Whoever you may be, Jesus speaks your language.

And because of that, you and I have been called to speak for Him, to speak His language to each other and to the communities in which we live. He has called us family; He has called us friends; He has called us His ambassadors. As a Church, and as individuals, are we speaking the language of Jesus?


2. Matthew 27:46. Other examples, among others, are found in Mark 5:41; 7:34; and Matt 5:22; 6:24.


11. Matt 15:30; John 8:11.


Eliezer Gonzalez lives on the Gold Coast with his wife Ana and their two children. He has a degree in linguistics and is currently completing a PhD in early Christian history. He is passionate about the growth of the kingdom of Christ.
The truth about YOLO

By Tiana Faull

We’ve all seen it; every teenager is talking about it and posting it on social media sites. Yes, that’s right, I’m talking about YOLO, an acronym for "You Only Live Once". It would be nice to think that YOLO was an excuse to live life to the full and achieve your goals, but sadly it’s just an excuse teenagers and even adults use to misbehave, thinking the consequences will somehow disappear as soon as the phrase is uttered.

As a Christian, I know that YOLO is in fact a false phrase. John 14:3-4 states that Jesus is preparing a place for us so that when He does come back to earth, He will take us up to heaven and we can live with Him.

“You know the way to the place where I am going,” Jesus said to His disciples. Although I’m not a literary scholar, I know what Jesus meant when He said this. The “way” is not the literal path that is taken to heaven, but rather the choices we make in life before we finally ascend.

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Our life on earth influences our life in heaven with the Creator of all things. If we do as God intends and do it
righteously we gain that "all access pass" into heaven, and YOLO is conquered. Instead, a new acronym comes into being—YOLOH or "You Only Live Once Here"—and if you live it right, you get another chance in heaven. The ultimate gift.

The truth about YOLO can be derived from the Bible story about the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24-27):

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fail, because it had its foundation on a rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a crash.”

Thus, we should be like wise men, building life on a strong foundation—otherwise we become foolish men who build their lives on the foundation of YOLO.

Tiana Faull did work experience with RECORD in 2012.