

2014 ADVENTIST FORUM CONFERENCE

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Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina



The Great Controversy • The Great Disappointment • The Great Advent Hope

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

— CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

Join great Adventist storytellers, including Chris Blake, Geoff Blake, Roy Branson, Kendra Haloviak-Valentine, Shelton Kilby, Gil Valentine, and many more....

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Christianity

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the impurity of the stretcher nor the impurity of a dead body, a big deal in the first century. Without hesitating for even a moment, Jesus reached out and said, “Young man, I say to you, rise!” And when the boy sat up, Scripture says that Jesus, like Elijah, “gave [the boy] to his mother.”

Then, the two crowds became one as all the people proclaimed: “A great prophet has risen among us!” “God has visited God’s people!”

Jesus had come in the spirit of Elijah. Jesus placed his body between the boy and the powers of chaos, the powers of death itself; using his body as a way to shout “No!” to that which destroys human life.

For 108 years, the Loma Linda University campus has been challenging that which destroys human life:

Because of its prophetic vision of a better day...

Because of its prophetic vision of health and healing and hope...

Because of the vision that someday there will be no disease...

Loma Linda fights disease now.

As one of our students at La Sierra University, Sterling Spence, said in his Honors project presentation: “Christianity is a vision that a better world is possible and once we practice that vision, our entire being changes, our focus shifts and we become actively a part of trying to create the kingdom here.”⁵

Every year hundreds of Loma Linda graduates complete their training and go all over the globe, continuing and expanding this prophetic vision; giving their bodies as sacraments of mercy, going toward the chaos—toward those who so desperately need life-altering words and death-defying actions.

Because of Loma Linda’s graduates, widows continue to be amazed as their children are returned to their arms. Communities are restored. Nations are healed.

Crowds are stunned and glorify God, saying, “The prophetic voice is here among us!” “God has visited God’s people!”

At the end of Luke’s gospel, Jesus shares bread with his followers and says, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 2:19). “Do this...,” and I don’t think he only meant eat the wafer. “Do this, give your body in remembrance of me.” It is a calling and a challenge to each of us. It is mysterious. It is a sacrament of mercy.

Epaphroditus and the *Parabolani*

Later in the Christian movement, when the apostle Paul was in prison, a man with a strange-sounding name—Epaphroditus—visited Paul. It was a risky thing to visit someone in prison. Most prisons were underground, so you had to be lowered in from above, and you were at the mercy of the guards to get out. Because they were underground, prisons were dank, dark dungeons, with no natural light; they accumulated human waste, rats, stale air, and in some cases allowed prisoners little to no movement by chaining them to the cell wall.

Paul, in his letter to the church at Philippi, the home church of Epaphroditus, says that this

brother “risked his life” for the work of Christ by taking care of Paul, coming very close to death himself (Phil. 2:25–30, 4:18).

I wonder what exactly Epaphroditus did for Paul. Did he clean Paul, who, if chained, would have been unable to clean himself? Did he catch an illness from the waste or the rats or the stale air? Did he get beaten by guards for insisting on something for his friend—food, water? How *did* Epaphroditus risk his life for Paul?

The verb used to describe Epaphroditus means “to risk life; to expose to danger” (Phil. 2:30), and it was a nickname later taken by Christians as a name of honor. They were the *Parabolani*—those who risk. They were known as those who cared for the sick. They performed works of mercy. They risked their own lives in caring for those with contagious diseases. They were willing to see that those who died of such diseases were properly buried. They were known as the ones who “risked their bodies on behalf of others.”

But it was not just risking for the sake of risking. Two years ago I was in Queenstown, New Zealand, and I stood on the edge of the Kawarau Bridge, where “bungy jumping” (bungee jumping) began back in 1988. I watched a young man, probably in his late teens or early twenties, as the bungee cord was tied to his feet and he jumped off the bridge, screaming as he fell the 154 feet to the water below. He was the first jumper of the morning.

Personally, I cannot imagine taking such a risk just for the sake of risk. And I know some of you are saying to yourselves that there’s less chance of getting hurt by bungee jumping than by driving home today on California Route 91, and you are probably right. But I’ll take my chances on the 91, thank you.

The *Parabolani* didn’t risk their lives just for the rush of risk. They believed in the way of Elijah and the way of Jesus. They believed in the self-sacrificial choices of Epaphroditus. They believed in sacraments—the visible sign of inward grace, and the need to respond to God’s mercy by acts of mercy toward others. They

believed that some things possess a sacred character, a mysterious significance. They believed in giving their bodies as sacraments of mercy.

Loma Linda graduates in the tradition of the prophets and Jesus

And I am thinking of this year’s graduates—those graduating in the School of Allied Health and the School of Public Health. As we honor our Emergency Medical Services graduates who are our first responders, those we most often think of as rushing toward the chaos—how grateful we are for you—we also remember that there are other kinds of wounds and needs and fears; not all are visible from the outside. These are cared for by a variety of healers: cardio-pulmonary specialists, radiation technicians, physical therapists, speech pathologists, health information managers and educators, medical technicians, physician assistants, nutritionists and dietitians, occupational therapists, and public health professionals.

Mercy ➔ continued on page 44...

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