

Noah and Knee Miah

TEENS TEACH TWEENS

Eduventure

Noah (Count) and other teens find joy and fulfillment in ministering to tweens. (Tweens are the generations soon to become teenagers.) Each youth has challenges not placed on most children.

The youth show how easy it is to be a part of the Great Commission of Matthew 28, and on a zero budget using scrap objects at hand.

heart to, no person that will tell them, 'I love you – just as you are.' Those teens go to bed at night with that mental pain, knowing that in the morning, that pain will still be there, and maybe even more intense.”

“Well what I learned in the conference is that the human body can only stand that mental pain for so long, and then it erupts like a volcano. That volcano of mental pain spews anger like scalding lava all around, even on itself. I've learned in that conference and in our missions event here today that God has a mission field that began just across the street and flows through this very room we're in right now. The question each of us must answer is this: “As we see the eruptions of pain all around us, are we going to run away and hide, or will that red river of lava remind us of the red river of redemption that flows from Calvary into each of us. Can we find a way to carry that red river to the lives of broken hearts within our neighborhood? Let's stand and bow our heads.” The soul-searching prayer followed.

{end} Or is it your beginning?

[~] [~] [~]

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[Tweens will become teens in a few short years]

by
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the objects on the missions table.” On a large easel, Tammy wrote three names in a column. Noah, Samson, and Knee Miah. She noticed a smile on most of the audience. She then added the word COUNT to the right of Noah.

The next half hour or so was used to tell the events that happened to the two teenagers – Noah and Samson, and Tammy's son, Dean (Knee Miah).

And then Brenda said, “This church has trusted me to teach the Beginners Class, and I'm humbled that you'd allow me such an important responsibility. But all these events we've just shared with you have actually taught this teacher a powerful lesson. Let me show you.” She walked over to a blackboard and spoke as she wrote on the board the words “Teens >> Dean >> Class >> their teacher.” She explained, “The lessons passed on, weren't sermons or technical facts about airplanes. The truth is, the lesson was about broken things, like that airplane, in God's plan to hold great value.

The lesson this teacher (pointing to her own heart) learned is the broken lives and dreams of teens around us are still filled with compassion for others. Sam and Noah showed this toward Dean. Maybe their brokenness connected with Dean and his bad knee and that was the link of compassion. The point is, maybe in our push to promote missions, we're blinded by our stereotyping all our older youth into a crowd called, 'Dangerous'. That's all we have, Pastor.”

Pastor stood and spoke in a tone that only comes from deep in the heart. “Before we close in prayer, I want to say just a word about 'dangerous'. In our last ministerial conference I learned about inside pain. Not from muscles and body pain, but mental pain... pain no medicine can reach. It's a pain within most teens today... it's the pain of having no purpose, no peace, no path to follow, no clear person to open their

Maybe the oddest item on the missions table was a model airplane with a broken wing – clearly no fun for anyone to play with, and had no business on any respectable missions table.

Einstein himself wouldn't be smart enough to figure why the chair on top of the table was the last item. And there was that old corn broom leaning against the chair. Tom clearly remembered putting it in the trash about two weeks earlier. Everyone took their seats with thoughts bursting with questions.

Pastor opened the missions event with prayer and then continued through all the usual announcements. He paused a moment or two and then looked at all his listeners – most of which had silver hair or none at all. He began, “this evening we're going to talk about trash... or actually learn about trash. Up until a few days ago, when I'd hear the word T-R-A-S-H, I'd picture all the piles of it across the street from our church. We all know there's plenty of it, in and around the old Luxman building. And then sometimes the word T-R-A-S-H would make me think of some of the teenagers we see around this part of town. I'd imagine those teens were about as worthless as that broken model airplane over there. Well, I know my feelings for the youth around us are going to be widened this evening and I'm sure yours are too. Brenda Prainor and Tammy Miah are going to share with you some exciting missions things that will also explain all these items on the missions table. I'm really anxious to learn about that grass covered heart poster. Ladies it's all yours.”

Before saying anything, Brenda and Tammy held out a large banner between them and then taped it to the wall behind the speaker's table for all to see often. It said, “COMPASSION BLOSSOMS FROM RUBBLE”. Brenda told everyone, “Tammy and I are going to tell you about three people and all

=01 THE MYSTERY BEGINS

It was a mystery, to be sure. But not of the fearful ugly kind. Brenny, (Brenda Prainor) the church secretary, noticed that on some days there'd be a pile of grass clippings and such, usually somewhere on the front sidewalk. “So who cares?” someone might say. “The wind will blow them away before morning. No big deal.” But nothing could be more wrong.



The piles all began early week before last. It was just a bit disappointing, in that Brenny felt a bit proud in keeping on top of things, besides all the administrative things, plus keeping a somewhat fresh pot of coffee at the ready. Pastor often referred to it as 'brain juice'. But she'd have no answers if asked about the randomly appearing piles.

Now, all of this would seem boring and terribly trivial. But maintaining a church in this part of town, requires a vigil for the unusual, close to a detective status. If you stood next to the church sign, proudly stating FIRST CHURCH of HIS WORD, with service times to follow, you'd see a crumbling neighborhood all around the church. It didn't seem like a part of town you'd want any of your loved ones to walk after dark. Even the new street lights installed two years ago, had been shot out; certainly target practice for souls angry with God and how He's treating them. Brenny fought hard to keep from thinking of this area as a 'broken glass jungle'.

So the questions persist, 'where have the piles come from? And more importantly, “What happens next?” Maybe the piles were 'sent' to keep Brenny on prayin' ground and a sharp

eye out for God's moving in this 'broken glass jungle'. Nevertheless, the only reply she had, to the piles question, would be they seem to only appear on Tuesdays and Thursdays – but would always disappear by the next morning.

Detective Brenny asked Tom Davis, one of the trustees, about the piles mystery. His reply carried a clear nonchalant chuckle with words that almost sounded like, “Who cares?” He briskly headed for his office near the furnace room and a stack of reports he'd fallen quite far behind on.

Brenny also noticed one other thing she wasn't sure if it was a clue to the puzzle or not. Two different times, she saw the same bike-rider peddling past the church. The condition of the bike matched the appearance of the teen rider and also the broken glass jungle neighborhood. But what was odd, was she never – not even once – ever saw another young person, of any age, in the area.

“Jungles are dangerous places,” thought Brenda. She'd often paint verbal pictures in the minds of her Beginners Sunday School class. Almost without a breath, she'd describe those jungles, full of dangers, were all made by God. They were made by God with people in them so afraid and confused in which way to turn, to get home and to safety and love. Once little Johnny's hand shot up and exclaimed, “Miss Prainor, I wanna help someone get home safe and to supper! Are you gonna teach us how to help?”

[~]

supper!”

Standing near the front of the group, and in a calm tone, Samson said, “Before my mom took terrible sick and died, the doctor had an airplane fly some special medicine in for her. And Noah... if that pilot hadn't learned real well, how to stay on course, the medicine wouldn't have gotten to her.” Sam sat down and let Noah continue to lead the group.

Each of the group had a chance to sit in the pretend pilot seat and guide the plane with the broom stick, while Samson held up the model airplane and moved the rudder and elevators in sync with the movements of the broom stick.

=13 COMPASSION BLOSSOMS FROM RUBBLE

This is truly weird, I'm tellin' ya,” Tom Davis, the church trustee, told his wife as they both slowly walked past the missions table. It just didn't fit. They just didn't go together. The large poster on the annex wall in bold letters shouted “We're About Missions!” The rows of chairs were filling up quickly with mostly adults asking each other if everything here was supposed to fit together. Then some of them would point at the long missions table, that usually displayed all sorts of artifacts you might find around a jungle mission station. But there wasn't anything like that. And that's what caused much of the confusion.

On the mission table was a row of items easily recognized, but they didn't have anything to do with each other. First was a pile of grass clippings and small weeds. Next to that was a poster clearly made by little children. There weren't any words on it. Only a ragged red Cross surrounded by a heart made of grass clippings. Next to the poster, on the table was a rock, red heart and a broken piece of glass taped to them.

every word and action to not destroy the ministry – this mission the teens were beginning with Dean and through him, with the Beginner's Sunday School Class.

When God is up to something, hearts are opened up and visions of how to care for others become clear, simple... and a reality. [~]

=12 TURN-ABOUT MISSION STATION

Pastor's curiosity could be contained no longer. Saturday, he made more than one trip past the annex glass door hazarding a quick glance to see how many youth were attending, and who. Moments later, when he saw everyone was testing the fresh baked cookies and some milk, he stepped in, introduced himself and welcomed everyone. He asked Tammy Miah, if she needed anything, and received a big smile with an “everything's A-OK” reply. Three of Dean's beginner classmates joined the group and sat on the edge of their seats the whole time. Rhonda wanted to know if God ever needed ladies to fly airplanes. She remembered her mama reading her a story about a lady named “Meely Hair-art”.

Listening to the group – doing pretty well on their own, Tammy laid down the dish towel and sat on an out-of-the-way chair. Noah crouched down a little and made good eye contact with Rhonda and then with the rest of his listeners. With enthusiasm in his tone, he said, “Oh – hey Rhonda... Amelia Earhart was a very famous lady pilot that showed everyone how great lady pilots can be, if they work hard. She flew almost all the way around the whole earth. And know what else? Lady pilots flew lots of airplanes in the war that helped save lives.” Little Johnny jumped up – with his hand held high, “I'll bet they helped everyone get home safe and to

=02 FIRST THINGS FIRST

Brenny had an office routine as solid as a wall around Jerusalem. Even before the coffee or computer was started, she'd sit at her desk, with head bowed, and ask God to guide her heart, hands, and mind. She realized the on-line research she often had to do, took her into the dangerous paths of the Internet jungle of Satan's neighborhood. Before her final amen, she so often thought of little Johnny's request about helping others get home safe and to supper. She took very serious, his question if she'd teach him and others how to help.

She wasn't entirely sure why, but a few days ago, she took a couple blades of grass from the mysterious piles and placed them on her desk, next to her computer. Those little green things wouldn't even cause someone else a second glance. But somehow to her, they were a reminder that God is up to something. Brenda would sometimes stare at them and wonder if any other people have their own little reminders that God is up to something.

Brenda was really good with forms, figures, and schedules and such. Yet she wished she had Norma's ability to write little poems from the heart. For sure, her first one would have to be Blades of Grass Reminders. The phone buzzed and her busy day full of tasks began, the two blades of grass didn't seem too concerned about all the action.

She never meant it to happen this way. It's probably just the way some things occur in God's spiritual neighborhood of broken glass, bicycles, and broken hearts.

Brenny began the next Sunday's object lesson for her beginners, holding up a couple blades of grass. Nathan remarked that his daddy was always complaining the stuff grew too fast and never seemed to get the yard cut all at one

time. But their teacher, in warm tones began telling her small class of another meaning for the grass clippings she held up for all to see. They held a mysterious promise to be learned in God's timing. The eyes and attention of the young listeners were all as peaked as if they were each a Sherlock Holmes master detective.

Miss Prainor didn't learn the depth of what she'd done, until next Sunday's class time when almost every one of the children brought a couple blades of their own grass in to class. Everyone seemed cheerful and expecting to learn how the blades of grass was going to help them get someone home to supper.

Hardly had the opening class prayer finished, than some whimpering was heard from the rear of the class. Rhonda's head was bowed with both hands covering her face. She felt so alone because she never thought of bringing in any blades of grass. In an instant, she believed she was an outcast in a room of grass reminders and smiling faces. Robert stood to his feet, walked over to Rhonda's desk and handed her one of his blades of grass. Dedee did the same, as did a couple others.

Jesus asked His heavenly Father for unity, like theirs. To teach unity to adults you use the verses of John 15. To children, use blades of grass, among broken glass - works great. Try it! [~]

=03 THE STALKER IN JEANS

This part of the mystery lacks more facts. That's probably as a mystery should be. No one at the stately old FIRST CHURCH of HIS WORD worship center, across the street, knew about the stalker. Well..... maybe stalker is a bit too strong a label. Probably just 'watchman'

they are.”

“After we had our class closing prayer most of the beginners gathered around Knee; I mean your Dean, and began asking more questions about the 'Staying on Course' class you had in the annex last Saturday. Most of them said they were going to ask their parents if they could come to the class this Saturday. Tam – God's up to something, and it sounds pretty exciting to me. I don't know how many will actually show up, but Friday I'll have my teen daughter make some missions cookies that we'll put in the annex refrigerator for backup. OK?”

Before the phone call ended, the two mothers had prayer for each other and for the children – the future of their FIRST CHURCH of HIS WORD congregation. Tammy also prayed for guidance in reaching out to the teen boys – Samson and Noah Count – that they learn the church loves them.

During some quiet moments later that day, Brenny got a little glimpse of maybe what God is up to. She thought while she had been teaching her beginners class, Knee Miah was teaching his classmates how to stay on course; from what Samson and Noah Count had been teaching him. But a far greater lesson was being learned by the class teacher.

She tried to imagine some of the hardships the two teens faced each day. As her hands tightly covered her own eyes, she tried to look through the eyes of the two teens. She made a mental list: broken glass, broken dreams, broken buildings with yards of rubble, broken bicycles and airplane wings. Her tissue caught the first tear as her vision showed the teen's compassion on Knee Miah with his crippled leg and very few friends.

It was like the actions of Sam and Noah were moving Brenny's attitudes about the teens in this part of town, back on God's Course. Her tenderest prayer begged God to guide her

more yummy missions cookies around 1 o'clock Saturday. We'd love to have you both back." [~]

=11 HE'S UP TO SOMETHIN' – THE WARNING

The phone rang. Dean's mom asked loudly, "Dean. My hands are soapy. Can you answer the phone, please?" "Sure, mom!" A couple seconds later he asked, "Mom! It's Mrs. Prainor. She wants to talk to you! And I didn't do nothin' wrong, either!" Actually, he just did. He shouted for his mom while he still had the phone up to his mouth. Oh well... beginner boys have lots to learn.

"Hi Brenny. My hands were soapy. Nice of you to call – you're so very busy these days, doing the church secretary work plus teaching my son's beginner Sunday School class. Say, have you seen Watson's new baby girl? All that curly hair and ear to ear smile. She's a peach."

"Yes, I have seen her. Before I forget, Pastor wanted me to compliment you on the great updates of the two Missions Bulletin Boards. Not only are they great reminders to our own church folks to be involved in missions, but he said they tell our visitors that our church has a real heart for missions – home and foreign missions."

THE WARNING

"Tammy (that's Mrs. Miah). The main reason I called was to warn you. Something odd is happening in my Beginners Class that you'll want to know about. In class Sunday, your Dean showed the rest of the us how a pilot keeps an airplane on course. He used a broom stick. The whole class really got a charge out of it. And I think... well, I believe God is up to somethin'. And without me asking them to, the class prayed for Noah and Samson to learn that God loved them... just as

would be better. A few well-chosen questions to the watchman would see there was never any harm intended.

At this point in our mystery, for convenience, we'll call our 'watchman in jeans', Noah. This Noah didn't have any boat or even know how to build one. About all he had was a bike that was a wreck. But when mom barely has money for the rent and meager groceries, your bike has to come from the town dump, over past Shavely Street. You can imagine what condition it was in. That's probably part of the reason people started calling him Noah. His given name is James. He can't remember how long it's been since they started calling him, Noah, or most often, Noah Count. Noah still hasn't learned exactly why, that name.

Noah's watching spot was a crevice between a trash barrel and the old Luxman Building. He used a piece of cardboard to scrape away the broken glass, and cans. He had propped up his wreck, I mean, his bike in a direction for a fast get-a-way, in case he was detected. But his mind and eyes were continually focused on the old church and all the greenery around it.

Tuesdays and Thursdays seemed to be the best time for him to spend 20 minutes or so, to pull out some of the unsightly long grass along the sidewalk. He didn't doubt it for a minute that the church had gas and electric machines for doing the fancy cutting and trimming around the church, but he couldn't figure out why he never saw anyone using them. The only thing Noah could figure was the directions for using them was too hard for anybody. Or maybe people wouldn't use them 'cuz the church wouldn't pay them enough.

With just a hint of a smile to himself, Noah thought of it as

'20 minute medicine'. And it isn't very easy to explain, either. The 20 minutes he spent pulling grass and weeds on Tuesdays and Thursdays.....well.... it just made him feel good. A couple times he'd rode his bike past the church on Sunday mornings, and he could hear a whole bunch of people singing and clapping their hands for God. And when he came over on Tuesdays and pulled grass on his knees, it was just like he'd get a lingering taste of the happiness that happened on Sundays. And Noah Count needed some smiling spirit, that seldom came.

Quite often this teen in jeans, this self-appointed watchman wished he had better clothes so he could come to the church on Sunday morning, like a church mouse and savor the happy time singing, first hand. Oh well. Maybe God means for lots of us to just be Noah Counts. That's a mystery to many people, for sure. But some of our mystery remains. What is Noah watching for? What is he expecting, specifically. What is it in this teen's heart that would thrill him to the core?

Noah might even ask you, if you're watching. What are you watching for? What is it in your deepest heart that would thrill you to the core? I hope it's more than a new bike or dinner. [~]

=04 SIDEWALK SUPPER – SORT OF

The Beginners Class, the next Sunday started out a little odd. Seven year old Dean Miah walked up to Miss Brenny's teacher desk with his usual limp. That's probably why he got the nickname "KNEE Miah". He plopped down a small bag of gum and some small suckers. He had taped on the bag, a little red heart he had drawn.

table. He grabbed a broom with a short handle and stood it on the floor between his little buddy's knees. He told Knee to hold the broom handle with his left hand. "Now to stay on course you hafta be able to go left and right like your dad does in his car. But in an airplane ya halfta go up and down too. Ya with me, little buddy?" "YOU BET!"

Noah continued, "OK. Here's where ya need to pay close attention. This broom handle is the "control stick". It's what the pilot controls the plane with. You pretend you're the pilot. If you want the plane to go right, you move the control stick to the right a little, like this." Noah and Knee moved the stick to the right. A similar explanation described the left turn. Even though the explanations continued, Noah's mind was still echoing the two words "little buddy." The words seemed to turn on a warm 'wanted' feeling inside his heart.

Sam held up the plane with the broken wing he had taped, as Noah showed how the RUDDER moved – the tail flapper that wagged like the tail of a happy dog. Knee moved the broom handle – the control stick left and right as Noah moved the rudder left and right. Noah asked, "How we doin'?" Knee was so excited with all this attention, his heart was in the clouds – those cotton candy clouds.

Noah next explained how moving the control stick forward made the airplane go down to land and moving the control stick back toward Dean's nose made the airplane climb higher. While Sam was holding the plane with one hand, he moved the tail ELEVATORS up and down.

Dean's mom finished the dishes and told the boys they'd have to continue the training next Saturday. Dean asked Sam and Noah for permission to take the airplane to his Sunday School class and show how to stay on course and not crash. Permission was given. Mrs. Miah said, "I should be baking

“Thanks mam for the cookies and friendship. My name's Sam – actually Sam Jr. My dad's name was Sam too. Some have called me Sam's son, that sounds like Samson. I want to work hard and help people that are worse off than I am. I know my clothes don't look like much but I want to help people so they will tell me 'thank you' and mean it.”

How is it that paper airplanes and cookies can bring together in the same room, Noah, Knee Miah, and Samson? Her thoughts were interrupted when her son Knee Miah said, “Mom look. These T shaped cookies might look like airplanes, but I think they look more like the Cross that Jesus died on!”

Directions out from stormy skies and broken dreams are being given at a kitchen table of cookies. [~]

=10 STAYING ON COURSE

This was so exciting it made her want to shout. Mrs. Miah began washing the cooking utensils and other things she'd used to make the cookies. It wasn't the dish washing that had her excited, it was listening to the enthusiasm of the two teens Noah and Samson and her young son nicknamed: Knee Miah.

As the boys carefully looked over the broken winged airplane that Samson had just brought, Knee noticed something was not right, and said so. “Sam you'll need to get more tape and fix the part of this back wing that looks loose... and here's another one.” In a friendly tone, Noah explained to Knee (that's Dean) those parts are supposed to be loose. He said, “That's how the pilot keeps his plane on course. Let me show ya.”

Noah slid the chair Knee was sitting on, out away from the

With the class listening, Knee was asked to explain the reason for the bag. The reply was simple and compassionate. “I don't know who the person is, pulling the grass to make God's house look nicer. And I don't know if the person is hungry for supper, but I want to share my gum and suckers with whoever it is.” Knee Miah returned to his seat as Miss Prainor finished taking attendance.

Young Barbara Timms asked if she could start the class with prayer. With a nod from the teacher, Barbara spoke up with, “Jesus. Help us to mind our moms and don't let the grass man be hungry or cold. Jesus - We want you to smile. Amen.”

Miss Prainor explained that next Tuesday she would put Knee Miah's goodie bag under the expected pile of grass. She then slid the flannel-graph figures back in their envelope. The lessons her pupils were now teaching, in word and deed were certainly making Jesus Christ smile.

Noah Count (that's the 'grass man') would soon learn that just on the other side of the wall of God's house was a whole class of young hearts turning toward his needs. Their first steps began with Knee Miah's small bag of candy and heart. How many walls are there around us that prevent love and provisions from getting to the needy, in Jesus' name?

You'll want to know the flannel-graph lesson that day was preempted by the history lesson of how a young boy gave his bread and fishes to Jesus and provided supper on the hillside for many moms and dads, boys and girls. The teacher's mind was already racing ahead with juicy lessons that included the mountain of leftovers from that hillside supper, of long ago.

Even the craft time activity that day was preempted. It was

the children's idea to use a large piece of paper and make the outline of a big heart with a pencil. Glue was drizzled on the outline and everyone spread their blades of grass on the glue. It was definitely a class grass heart. Very carefully, each student helped draw a sunny bright cross right in the middle of the heart.

A couple weeks later, Miss Prainor got teary-eyed explaining the grass heart and the preceding events to the attendees in the monthly teacher's meeting. In those moments the pastor was already forming in his mind some pieces of next Sunday's sermon – something about 'a little child shall lead them'. [~]

=05 THE BROKEN HEART

As the door of the Beginner's Sunday School Class was closed, Miss Prainor spoke to her class. “I know you all want to know what happened to the gum, suckers, and the 'grass man', as you call him. Well, the pile of grass and goodie bag disappeared by Wednesday morning. But then something strange happened. When I went to put some more suckers under the pile Thursday, I found this.” She held up Knee Miah's red heart and a broken piece of glass was stuck to it.

The glass wasn't dangerous or anything, but was definitely connected to the heart. She laid it on a sunny window sill so that everyone could clearly see. The teacher asked her class of 12 beginners a question she didn't even have an answer to. “Class what does it mean? Is the Grass-man, or girl, giving us a message? Is there something we are supposed to learn?”

The children were all asking each other if they knew the answer. Young Tommy didn't usually speak up in class. But he asked the class, “Maybe we're supposed to connect the broken glass with the heart and think of a 'broken heart'.” The

son with his bad knee – from the gravel spill. Dean really treasures your shirt you wrapped around his knee. I was thinking it'll be tough to persuade my son to give you back your shirt, so I got two shirts from the store in your size – as a gift of love from our family to you. One shirt is a summer shirt and the other is a warm winter shirt.”

With a warm quiet smile, Noah held both shirt packages to his chest. His heart began to wash away his feelings of being worthless – of being a Noah Count. More milk and cookies disappeared as smiles grew bigger. “Well, fellas. I tried to make some cookie shapes that would be like airplanes but I don't think they worked so well. These round cookies could be wheels with the spokes. I made these T shaped cookies but they don't quite look like airplanes.” Both boys agreed they tasted great, anyhow.

About the time the last sheet of cookies came out of the oven, someone knocked at the annex door. Mrs. Miah went to see who knocked – since no one ever knocks – they usually just walk in. At the door was a teen that looked about the same age as Noah, but had a ring in each ear and partially green hair. He was invited in to try some airplane cookies and he politely followed.

As the green hair entered the kitchen Noah recognized his somewhat familiar friend, and said, “Hi ya, Sam! Ya gotta try these cookies.” “Well... I'll try one. I don't wanna put anybody out. I just came to bring ya this.” He softly set a model airplane on the table. It's got a busted wing, but I tried to tape it. I was thinking maybe you could use it with your cardboard airport I saw you messing with a couple days ago.”

Mrs. Miah smiled to herself seeing before her how cookies have become great medicine for broken spirits and stormy skies, today and many days gone by.

her church. The tears really flowed when her mind thought of the people in the control tower didn't care about the airplane in the stormy skies. In the same way – the church didn't care about teens in their stormy lives not being given clear comforting directions on how to get home and supper. [~]

=09 WHEELS AND BROKEN WINGS

It was one of those things that can only happen by God's hand. This Saturday was like that. Knee was playing with his paper airplane and cardboard airport on the church front lawn. His mom, Mrs. Miah began baking some cookies in the church annex kitchen. How odd. In all of her life, this was the first time she was baking cookies for no clear reason. But the efforts warmed her heart.

She kept thinking about Noah's statement that he and other teens have no directions that come with compassion. It seemed adults couldn't say one sentence to them without stern looks and “don't do that!” or “Stop doing that!”

Like a flash of lightning from heaven, Mrs. Miah had her answer. She went directly to the outside door of the annex and spotted her son Dean and his new teenage friend, Noah.” She spoke loudly, with an excited tone, “Boys! Can you come here? I need your help for a minute!” They came immediately, following the fresh cookie smells as she led the way to the kitchen and two settings of milk and fresh baked cookies.

Noah was polite and quiet. He knew to bow his head as Dean's mom began with, “Dear Jesus. Thank you for milk and cookies, and thank you for Dean's new friend, Noah.” After a couple bites of cookie and swallows of milk by the boys, she said to Noah, “Noah. Thank you so much for your saving my

whole class went silent as a graveyard. After everyone heard the 'broken heart' idea, all you could hear was the wind blowing past the windows. Everyone's eyes were fixed on the 'broken heart' sitting on the window sill.

After a few quiet moments, Miss Prainor asked one of the children to open the class with prayer. Tommy just began, “Jesus – help teacher explain to us about the grassy heart and the broken heart. I love you. Men. I mean Amen.”

Tommy's prayer for Miss Prainor pierced her heart so deeply, she had to wipe her eyes and nose twice. It took extra moments getting a breath mint from her purse to calm her spirit and focus on her prepared lesson. She felt so little; so inadequate to fulfill Tommy's prayer. She wanted a miracle at that moment to transform her into one of the beginners and be able to sit among them and learn more from them. She questioned herself – why do grownups make Christian living and love so complicated? These beginners already understand what to do and how to do it; how to make Jesus smile. [~]

=06 THE PLANE CRASH

It was the last Friday of the month and time to update the church missionary bulletin board. Dean Miah (code named: Knee Miah) and his mom were busy with the project of their love for missions. Young Knee asked, “Mom, can I go outside and practice flying this paper airplane dad folded for me last night? I'll stay out of the street.” His mom said it was OK. The thing was. That wasn't the whole reason Knee wanted to go out on the church lawn. He wanted to pretend he was a detective and he wanted to see if he could spot any mysterious grass piles or clues to learn who was putting them there, and then removing them.

This young detective was getting better at launching his streamlined paper airplane but came close to losing it in the bushes, a time or two. Without realizing it, he was now launching his plane in the grass in front of the church. His bad knee was beginning to bother him a bit, but there was more of the church grass and bushes to look for clues. He imagined himself standing in front of his Beginners Sunday School class and explaining some of the important clues he had discovered and their meaning.

His next airplane launch was his best ever. A small breeze caught it and floated out over the street and crashed in the gravel near the far curb. There was no way he was going to leave it there, when his dad worked hard folding it for him. Knee Miah paused, looked both ways on the street and proceeded across to get his airplane. About two steps from his airplane, Knee's bad leg caused him to stumble and fall in the small amount of gravel. He went down and he really hurt. His bad knee, the one that was the birth defect was skinned and turning red like a tomato. It sure didn't look like Knee was going to jump right up and move out of the road.

It almost scared Knee Miah when a teenage boy rushed out from the piles of trash and condemned building not far from where Knee now lay – in real pain. With just a few words, “You're OK. I Gotcha! Don't be afraid,” the teen picked up Knee Miah and carried him back across the street and carefully sat him on the church steps. Knee silently watched the teen take off his own ripped shirt and tie it around Knee's injured leg. The teen (we'll learn later was called, “Noah Count”) stepped up to the church door, rang the door bell, and then hurried back across the street. Noah grabbed his bike with the wobbly wheel and quickly rode away without looking back.

Only seconds later, Pastor opened the door and saw Mrs.

work for a pretend airport. We can use this tall skinny box for the control tower. We can connect the two boxes together.”

The word stabbed the heart of both boys, never to be forgotten. If they both lived to be a hundred, hearing the word “We” used both times, became a glue that instantly bonded them like connecting the two different shaped boxes. Maybe it's not something little boys often think of, but at that moment Knee imagined he could see Jesus smile. It was one of those deep-down things that aren't easy to explain, especially for a young fella like Knee.

Mrs. Miah stuck her head out the church door to check on her son just about the time Noah took her son over just beyond a small bush just a couple feet high. She saw Noah hold the paper airplane behind the bush. “Knee. See where I'm holding the airplane? The bush could be some stormy clouds so that the make-believe pilot can't see the airport and to land.” The younger boy slowly nodded that he was understanding the problem and finally said, “the pilot can't get home and to supper 'cuz he doesn't know what direction to go in.” The teen gave a soft smile with, “You got it.”

Dean's mom was about to close the door and finish her mission board project when she heard the teenager, who's ragged shirt her son was wearing like a treasure, open his heart just a little. “Knee, there are many of us teens, like me, that feel we are lost and confused about what direction home is. We don't even know how or where to get the right directions.”

The eavesdropping mother couldn't listen anymore. She quietly closed the church door and sat in a church foyer chair. One hand covered her tears as the other wiped her nose with a retrieved tissue. Amid the tears, Knee Miah's mom imagined the cardboard box airport and control tower were the church –

days before.

His mom checked on him once, saw all was well and returned to her missions board decorating. At the same time, the different colors of crayons in Knee's fingers became streamlined shapes on the airplane that all high speed aircraft must have. Knee ran across the church lawn a few times with the airplane held high against the blue sky and cotton candy clouds. But then things turned odd.

Without warning, a teenager in ragged clothes walked across the street toward Knee Miah. He didn't look menacing or troublesome in any way. His face showed a soft attitude that drew your attention away from the two cardboard boxes he was carrying.

Knee recognized the teen as the one that rescued him from the street and carried him to safety. Knee remembered the soft caring words he had heard the teen speak to him that eventful day - "You're OK. I Gotcha! Don't be afraid". In these moments those words loudly echoed in young Dean's mind and heart. He wanted so badly to hug the teen, but thought it would scare him away. Instead, he quietly sat on the church steps, massaging his bad knee and watched what the teen did.

"How's your knee doing?" asked the teen, as he picked up a crayon and began drawing shapes on one of the boxes. "It's doing pretty well. My mom has to rub smelly stuff on it before I go to bed every night. What's your name?"

"I'm Noah. The other kids call me 'Noah Count' 'cuz they figure I won't amount to nothin'." Noah didn't say much more. It was like it pained him to talk about not having much of a home and no family. The teen continued drawing all sorts of square shapes on the cardboard box. After a few moments, Noah said, "There. That should about do it. He looked at his young friend wearing the ragged shirt and said, "That might

Miah's son (that's Knee) in need of some quick first aid. Among the young whimpers and occasional "OUCH!", Knee was comforted. On the way home, Knee explained to his mom what all had happened – especially the teenage words, "You're OK. I Gotcha! Don't be afraid," Knee let go of the ripped shirt the teen had given him, only when his mom promised to give it right back to knee as soon as she was finished washing it. [~]

=07 SHIRT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

As the Sunday worship service began, with songs and announcements, the Pastor stepped to the microphone and said nothing for a moment or two. Silently he looked at all the families watching him. He began, "A few minutes ago, I heard of an accident this week, right here in front of our church, that, well, maybe wasn't an accident at all – in God's way of doing things. I'm going to have young Dean – Dean Miah come up and help explain. Dean, you have your mom walk up here and tell us what happened while your mom was working on our missions bulletin board."

Now Dean's shoes were polished and his pants were clean and pressed, like every Sunday. But folks were a bit surprised to see the ripped shirt Dean (that's Knee Miah) was wearing. His mom held the microphone down low for Dean as he began telling about the mysterious grass piles, the heart and broken glass, and his accident in the gravel getting his airplane. Dean began getting choked up as he told everyone about the unnamed teenager that comforted him with the words, "You're OK. I Gotcha! Don't be afraid."

What even surprised Mrs. Miah, was when Knee said, "Our Beginner's Class teacher, Mrs. Prainor has been teaching us

that when we make Jesus smile, it's like he's telling us, 'I Gotcha! Don't be afraid.' We're learning how to make Jesus smile.” Knee made sure everyone saw the ripped shirt sacrifice as he walked away from his mom still holding the microphone. She stood straight and in a very serious tone said, “We often think of missions as being hundreds of miles from here, maybe in a jungle clearing. The truth is, our mission field begins right across the street in front of us. Does it take a special talent or skills? Not at all. Those first steps of love, take little more than a ripped shirt and a Good Samaritan attitude.”

Timing Is Everything

No one noticed except the pastor's wife. The pastor took the sermon notes he had worked on so very hard all week, folded them, put them back in his coat pocket. The Holy Spirit had a slightly different message for today's service.

He began, “We adults are quick to criticize and condemn teens today. They dress, talk, and act in ways we call odd. We think their home address is a different planet. Sometimes their erratic behavior may even make us fearful and wanting to shun them... Let me ask you. How is it those piles of grass have been appearing and then disappearing? Who put the broken piece of glass with the little red heart one of our beginners made? What is it that changes young hearts from being entertained by the Bible stories we've all learned and loved – changes their focus on how to make Jesus smile?”

Pastor pauses to let his questions take root.

“As your pastor of FIRST CHURCH of HIS WORD, here in this neighborhood known for its broken glass, broken families, and broken dreams, my biggest question is this. How is it that the teenager – who sacrificed his shirt and comforted Dean, noticed the accident in the gravel? My heart

shouts at me that he was watching! This teen is watching our church. He may even be the one making the weed piles. I don't know. But God does, doesn't He?”

Pastor looked down at Knee Miah and his ragged shirt treasure and said, “Dean, I wish I had a ragged treasure like God has given you, I really do. I don't think any of us know exactly why the teen is watching us. Maybe he's looking for a way to say 'I love your church, and your songs'. He might be thinking, 'in my broken life, your church songs and spirit make me warm inside'.”

The following message was simple and straight forward. The message that really hit home with the listeners was that we must be prepared. What can we have ready, what can we do that proves we are a mission-minded Christian?

It sort-of makes you want a miracle that would make you fit into the class of beginners learning more about broken glass hearts and ragged clothes – and making Jesus smile. `

=08 LOST IN THE CLOUDS

No one had any idea the surprises that were to appear today, this sunny Saturday. Mrs. Miah and her young son (that's Dean, code named Knee Miah) had just one more missions bulletin board to update, in the Junior Church annex of the FIRST CHURCH of HIS WORD. While his mom worked on the bulletin board, Knee sat on the church front steps with his crayons and supersonic paper airplane his dad folded for him. He kept his crayons in a little shaded spot where they wouldn't get soft and melt. Knee wasn't sure exactly why, but he just felt comforted in some way, wearing the ragged shirt the mysterious teenager gave him, as Knee was rescued from his fall in the street, some