

Rev Rita Message June 13 2021

Good friends John & Clive often enjoyed a pint over lunch at The Eagle and Child brewpub in the neighborhood that surrounds University of Oxford. Both professors and both aspiring writers, they often discussed what they were working on. John was a historian of the English language, and he loved fantasy type stories. Stories with wizards and kings and dragons. Clive was a professor of medieval English literature, and he had a liking for fairy tales. He was also developing a world and characters for his writing. Eventually that lunch for two grew into a small group of Oxford professors of literature and philosophy who shared food and drink and their writing for feedback and encouragement. They called themselves the Inklings.

The stories that John and Clive wrote and discussed would become books and movies that would influence hundreds of millions of people. You see, John is J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit, and Clive is C.S. Lewis, author of the Chronicles of Narnia and many other works about Christianity. When they first met, Tolkien was a Christian and Lewis was slowly becoming one. These men were serious about their religion in a time and place where that was not encouraged. They worked together to critique each other's work and support each other as they sought to use their imagination to project the Christian faith in a way that had the power to fascinate people and commend itself as worth taking seriously. Lewis, in particular, influenced millions of people's understanding of the character of God and the Gospel, and that is what Lewis was trying to do through the Chronicles of Narnia. His goal was to retell the story of the Gospel in a different and new kind of language.

As influential as both of these men and the rest of the Inklings were, had you been there in that pub when they were meeting, you probably wouldn't have noticed them. You would have just seen a group of stuffy old English professors who seemed like nothing special. You wouldn't have noticed anything. But if you had eyes to see, you would see that God was at work.

The kingdom of God that would go out to influence millions of people was happening right there in that corner of that small brewpub in Oxford, England. The kingdom of God is like that. It's like a group of English professors sitting in the corner of a brewpub. It's like a mustard seed, or as a little bit of yeast as Jesus described it in the parables we just read in the Gospel of Luke.

The Fellowship of the Least Coin is a global ecumenical prayer movement for justice, peace, and reconciliation led *by* Christian women *for* women and girls all over the world. Women of all ethnicities, nationalities, ages, educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses are invited to participate in this global movement by praying for justice, peace, and reconciliation in their own lives whenever they experience personal conflicts and challenges. As well, they are invited to pray for justice, peace, and reconciliation for women and girls all over the world who face injustice, violence, and poverty every day.

The idea for the Fellowship of the Least Coin came out of the experience of Shanti Solomon of India. In September 1956, she was part of the Pacific Mission Team of seven women from different countries that traveled in Asian countries after World War II. When Shanti Solomon was refused a visa to Korea in the middle of the trip, because Korea did not have diplomatic relations with India, she went to the Philippines to wait. While there, she reflected on the experiences of their travel in the war-torn countries of Asia and the national and economic barriers that kept women apart.

Upon the return of the team, she suggested that prayer could transcend every national boundary. She challenged the Christian women of Asia and of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S. to launch a project of Christian prayer and positive action in which every woman could participate, no matter her economic position. Once a month, when a woman prayed the Least Coin prayer she was to set aside a “least coin” of her currency. For Canadians, that would be 1 nickel or 60 cents per year. It was an encouragement to the women of the team to demonstrate their unity, in Christian faith, regardless of their country or economic circumstances. They all accepted it as a way to express their solidarity with suffering humanity and with women of every nation.

Since then, The Fellowship of the Least Coin has raised millions of dollars and prayed millions of prayers that have transformed the lives of people throughout the world. It began with a prayer and a coin not much bigger than a mustard seed.

In the scripture reading, the small mustard seed becomes a large tree and is a reminder how important every contribution, every commitment, and every action can be for the growth of God’s reign of peace and justice, healing and reconciliation. Every act of service, every gesture of love, every gift we give has value and makes a difference to bring about healing, hope, and help in our communities and in the world.

Jesus’ words are an invitation to value our efforts and contributions as God does. Because the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, we can be confident that our small seeds of faith, love, and hope will have a positive impact and that hatred, despair, and injustice will not have the last word. I believe that it is also a reminder that we are called as Christ followers to do what we can and not fret about what we cannot do.

May God help us to have love that stays faithful for the long haul, the persistence that will not give up, and the grace to trust God even when we cannot see results.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

