

All Age Service

Sermon Outline for Creation Time/Back to School

with Literacy Project Focus



The Extraordinary Life of a Pencil:





Do you know where your pencil comes from?

Some students from Mayo recently won an eco-awareness competition by producing a video on the life of a pencil (video link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTS2BV94D-c>)

In it they tell us that one tree from the Sierra Nevada forest in America makes 170,000 pencils.



But to make a pencil you need a few different materials:

- Californian Cedar Wood
- Brazilian Graphite (vale mine)
- Thai Rubber
- Chinese Aluminium



The humble pencil is globally interconnected!

The pencil is made using resources from around the world to become a very powerful tool

- A key to space explorationⁱ
- Was used to compose the greatest melodies



- To write the greatest books – the old man and the sea – Ernest Hemmingway; Of mice and men – John Steinbeck
- To theorise the most revolutionary maths equations:



Pencils are made and then distributed throughout the world. They find themselves in the strangest of places and being used for the strangest of uses!

- Drumming
- Chewing
- Spinning/fidgeting
- Throwing when frustrated
- Games: flicking or throwing or floating in water
- Wearing in hair
- Finding where a door sticks
- Getting the mud out of groves in shoes
- Pushing buttons
- Getting rid of blocks in drains/hooovers
- Use the shavings to repel moths
- Use the shavings to make art
- Sketching a drawing
- Chopsticks
- Smaller pencil as finger splint



- Book marker
- Door stopper
- Sobriety test by the guards
- Measuring device
- For plugging up a hole
- For punching a hole (in plastic wrap, cardboard box, soil for planting seeds)
- Magic wand
- Foot scratcher

A pencil has lots of uses!

Sometimes, just sometimes, a pencil finds itself in the hands of someone who wants to learn to read and write:

In 2016, 758 million adults (aged 15 years and older), two-thirds of whom are women, remain illiterate.

International Literacy Day



Save the date: 8 September 2017

Bishops' Appeal Supported Projects:

Women's Literacy in DRC and Ethiopia

In communities shook by conflict and poverty, people were asked what they needed and responded with requests for literacy and numeracy.



Feed the Minds project:

Democratic Republic of Congo

Small Literacy & Numeracy Groups that targeted women and people with disabilities

Local networks developed so women didn't have to travel far.

Soap Making co-operatives set up.



Peace building and conflict resolution built into the programme

Madam Anyesi Saidi... My husband is unemployed because of his alcoholism. I am the sole earner in the family. Honestly, I can hardly send my children to school, when I can barely cover clothing costs and medical treatment for the family. The project has led to considerable change in my life – not least because I was elected as a leader of the cooperative group. This was a dream for me – leading my fellows. I was also lucky enough to be identified as one of the first of our group to benefit from the start-up funds our group generated from soap production revenue. This has helped me to invest in my farming crops and sell fish. The project has given me

diplomacy skills, and taught me how to be an effective leader. This has impacted on my family life, as it has given me renewed energy to collaborate with my husband and support him to be a productive contributor of the household. More should be invested in vocational skills to set women free from economic dependency.

Madam Riziki Chandja... I am 38, living in Kibanga and have 6 children. However, I was only able to send 2 to school. The programme has enabled me to discover myself, and know my strengths. I am now committed to my own education, and that of my children. I try to read as much as I can, and support my children to perform well. I now make soaps and send them to the market to sell. I also work voluntarily for our cooperative group once per week in the soap workshop, where I encourage other women to become self-reliant and adopt the strategies taught through the programme. I have managed to save \$50 which I have pledged to the cooperative as an act of recognition, to support it going forward and support others to overcome extreme poverty. The best thing about the programme is that I can send all of my children to school.



MU Literacy Circles:



The Literacy Programme in Ethiopia began in 2012, however, much of that time has been against a background of difficulty and regional conflict. Gambella region is on the border with South Sudan and since the conflict broke out in South Sudan in December 2013, they have seen wave after wave of refugees come across the border. Currently, 381,043 refugees have been come across the border from South Sudan.



In the dry season, without the protection of long-grass and impassable swamps, many villagers live with the constant fear of being attacked by raiders from the Murle tribe in South Sudan

who want to steal cattle and children. Even as we are writing this, we have just heard initial reports of a raid in the south of the region that has left 28 people dead, and 43 children kidnapped.

Against this struggle, the literacy programme is opening up possibilities, new opportunities and fresh horizons, which they never could have hoped for. In Bonger, there are two sisters who are part of the literacy circle, they were both victims of domestic violence and decided that they together could set up a new life for themselves. Through, the literacy circle, they received agricultural training and they started growing tomatoes, potatoes, okra and chilli peppers, with these they have been able to support their 5 children. This year, the floods came and washed away their crops, however, they



know that they have the knowledge to start all over again. They want to work towards a metal roofed house.

Those living in Jewi refugee camp have fled conflict in south Sudan. many women had began literacy training in South Sudan and continued their education when the circles were set up in their refugee camp. In the 'extraordinary life of a pencil' some would

have gone on those journeys with the women who fled with only what they could carry.

In the Jewi refugee camp, the literacy circle recently had their literacy and numeracy exam. When Isaac, the programme manager set the exam, he said that you should have seen the learners faces when they could pass the exam easily and could graduate their literacy circle! It was so encouraging to see! One of the learners, Elizabeth said, "I can compare illiteracy to being blind, becoming literate is like recovering your sight – it is like a miracle! I feel like somebody now, I feel comfortable in my own skin and I feel capable!"

Purpose & Biblical Calling:

Even more than a pencil, A *person* has lots of potential. But without opportunities, without access to education, access to jobs, they are unable to dream, unable to hope and can become trapped in poverty.

In the right setting, with the right resources, a pencil can be used as it was intended. To write, to calculate. In the right setting and with the right opportunities a person can live as they were intended – with dignity and with enough. Literacy is helping to provide this for many people today.

The question is: Will we live as we were intended to live? Will we live lives worthy of the calling we have received?

In the Bible there are references to God writing his laws on our hearts: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them in their hearts. And I will be their God and they shall be my People." Hebrews 8:10

What are God's laws? Jesus says they are summed up in one: Love God with all that you are and Love others as you love yourself.

Our calling is to Love. As we play our part, we choose to persist in our service of others, even when we are tired, worn out, pared down. In Proverbs 3:3 it says 'Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.'



Look at the lines on the palm of your hand. They are engraved into your palm. They are apart of you. That is how God wants kindness and truth to be in your life. So much a part of you that they are 'written', engraved on your heart like the lines are on your palms.

The Parable of the Pencil:

The Pencil Maker took the pencil aside, just before putting him into the box.

“There are 5 things you need to know,” he told the pencil, “Before I send you out into the world. Always remember them and never forget, and you will become the best pencil you can be.”

“One: You will be able to do many great things, but only if you allow yourself to be held in Someone’s hand.”

“Two: You will experience a painful sharpening from time to time, but you’ll need it to become a better pencil.”

“Three: You will be able to correct any mistakes you might make.”

“Four: The most important part of you will always be what’s inside.”

“And Five: On every surface you are used on, you must leave your mark. No matter what the condition, you must continue to write.”

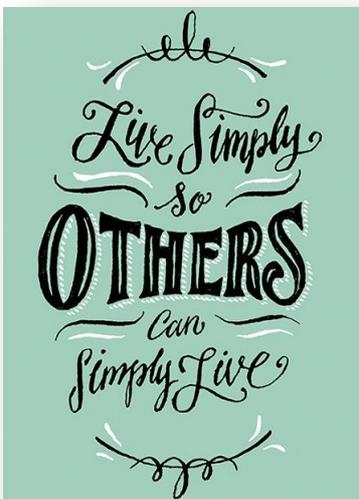
The pencil understood and promised to remember, and went into the box with purpose in its heart.

Creation Time Focus:

Do you know that when you sharpen a pencil, if you put the parings into your regular bin it ends up in a landfill and achieves nothing? BUT if you compost your parings, they become broken down to enrich the soil and to help grow flowers and grass and maybe even trees. What an extraordinary life a pencil can have! And yet it completely depends on who is holding the pencil that determines the kind of life it has.



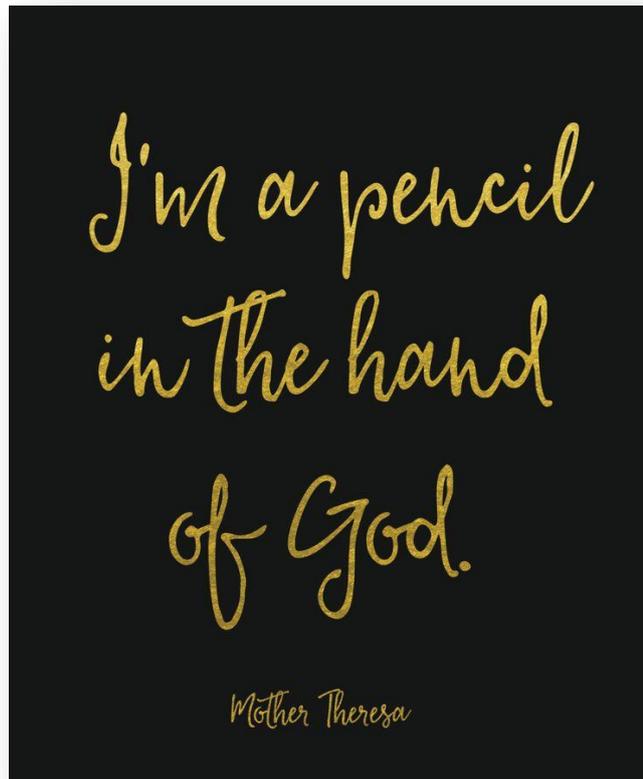
In many ways, we are like pencils!



Our lives can be extraordinary. We have the chance to live putting back and not just taking out. In Creation Time we think of this by finding ways to live simply and to live mindfully.ⁱⁱ As we take little steps and are consistent, we realise that we are made to be more outward looking. It doesn’t just make us feel good because we are doing the right thing, but living with less stuff and with less waste, makes us realise that we never needed all that excess to be

content. In fact, we are more content without many aspects of it. And our choices have a knock on affect.

Certainly, choosing to care about women learning to read and write in conflict zones in DRC and Ethiopia has a huge knock on affect. We can live extraordinary lives that leave their mark on this world if we allow ourselves to be held and guided by God. And in doing so, we release others to live life more fully, rather than to just survive.



ⁱ There is a story doing the rounds that during the Space Race, the Americans (NASA) spent millions designing a pen that would write in space. If you use a normal pen, because there is no gravity and everything floats, the ink won't stay on the paper. It is vital that an astronaut can write down their data and so huge amounts of money was invested. Sometime later, they asked the Russians how they had coped in space. Legend has it, the Russians shrugged and said 'we used a pencil.'

ⁱⁱ We do this by not buying and surrounding ourselves with more and more stuff. Instead of buying things for convenience, with non recyclable plastics and short life cycles that end up in our seas and landfills, we buy things that are sustainable or recyclable or that we won't waste. Other ways: Turning off taps, harvesting rainwater, growing herbs and wildflowers for bees and other wildlife, hanging washing out, using energy efficient appliances, shopping with a conscience, using the car less, etc.