

GOD'S SUPPLIES, WHEN WE NEED HELP

It was one of those times when I wished I could trust God.

It seemed totally impossible for God to make sure we had what we really needed. But there it was, in the Bible, in Philippians 4 v. 9, *'God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.'* I was furious with God about it, and then I gave in to tears.

Just imagine the scene. There I was, a relatively new missionary in Thailand, sitting on the veranda of our Thai wooden house that was perched on stilts ten feet above the ground. The house was on the edge of paddy fields, in the centre of 'the rice bowl of Asia'.

There I sat that Christmas Eve. I had no special food, or anything special to give my children the kind of Christmas I longed to give them.

It wasn't as if I'd forgotten to budget to ensure we had enough money for Christmas. The fact was that there wasn't very much money with which to budget. The money we had received for the months coming up to Christmas, was hardly enough for me to feed the family on rice, Thai curries and stews. Usually, we were quite contented eating the type of food that a Thai, up-country teacher, would eat. It was simple, basic and we enjoyed it.

But Christmas was different. At Christmas, I wanted a mince pie, a slice of Christmas cake, a bit of stuffing for chicken, brandy butter^{๑๕} and a glass of nice wine. None of these were obtainable where we lived in the middle of the rice-fields of central Thailand.

In previous years, I had managed to save enough money to buy a few of these delicious goodies in Bangkok, when we visited the city on business. This year it was difficult enough making money stretch round our normal simple foods. There was none available for Christmas.

I sat on the Veranda of our house, alternately crying and raging at God. It just wasn't fair. There I was working as a doctor as hard as I could. I was examining and treating between 70 to 100 patients every day – couldn't God at least provide me and my family with Christmas lunch?

That Bible verse *'My God shall supply all your needs...'* kept flashing into my mind. Every time it did, I would mentally mutter to myself, 'Christmas lunch is not a *need*... I'll live without it... it's something I *want*.' I wasn't too sure that God was going to supply my '*needs*' let alone my '*wants*'.

Feeling thoroughly grumpy, I almost didn't pick up the intercom telephone when it rang. It was the gatekeeper of the main hospital compound where I lived. He explained, "Doctor there are 10 cars on the hospital drive, all full of foreign women, and they're saying they've come to see you. Just one lady speaks Thai, so come quickly in case it's an

emergency!’

I trudged over to the front gate of the hospital, ready for anything. I recognised one of the elegant ladies, dressed totally inappropriately for up-country Thailand - wearing beautiful shoes that would rapidly be wrecked by the muddy hospital driveway.

She called out to me, ‘Dr Anne, we met once at church in Bangkok. We’ve ‘come from the Bangkok British Wives’ group. We’ve driven for three hours with our cars full of Christmas food for you and your hospital staff!’ I couldn’t believe it. Bags and boxes were unloaded containing Christmas puddings, mince pies, stuffing for chickens, brandy butter, wind and all the expensive foods that we missionaries could not buy for ourselves that year. She smiled, explaining that they must return immediately to reach Bangkok before dark, when it would be dangerous for them to be out on the roads.

I spent an amazing couple of hours distributing Christmas food to all my fellow missionaries – the Thai staff and patients would not have liked Westerner’s Christmas goodies..

By the time I got home, tears were running down my face. Not only had God supplied Christmas food for me and my family from a totally unlikely source, but God had also supplied enough for every missionary family living in that hospital compound.

‘My God shall supply all your needs,’ says the Bible. Growing up during the food shortage in the War of my childhood, I’m someone who worries if my freezer, ‘fridge and larder are not filled to the brim. I’m someone who the Government has identified as being extremely vulnerable. I can’t go out beyond my front door step and find it difficult to trust that John and I will be fed adequately. At this time, as we try to trust God to meet all our different needs during the Coronavirus pandemic, we may be encouraged by remembering how God gave me the most unlikely gift of Christmas lunch. It was over and above our *needs*, it was God supplying a *want*. It came as a reminder that God really was looking after us. You and I can be God’s channels - through whom friends, neighbours and total strangers not only have their needs met but possibly also have a *want* supplied. When we ‘have’, we can share with a neighbour who ‘has not’ ἵνα ἵσταται

Sharing Communion with other people in church is impossible now. But, because I’m a priest, I can celebrate Holy Communion in my own house. Today, John and I had a beautiful service together in our sitting room. We have bread in the freezer that we can use to remember Christ’s body broken for us. When it came to wine, symbolising Christ’s blood poured out for us, I *wanted* something different. The only wine in our house was ancient mulled wine - better than nothing! I jokingly shared this with a friend by email. The next thing to happen was a wonderful bottle of Port landed on our doorstep – my friend’s response to my *wanting* ‘proper’ wine to celebrate the Eucharist.

God will supply our needs at this difficult time. It’s very hard to be stuck indoors, not going to the shops, not being able to access on-line supermarkets, not knowing who might do the next weekly shop for us and perhaps, literally, not knowing where the next meal is going to come from. God will look after us – and it doesn’t matter whether we have sufficient faith to believe this or not. The promise is, *‘God will supply all your needs.’*

When you're frightened about not having enough to manage on, remember me that Christmas, years ago, getting Christmas lunch with all the trimmings. God will not abandon us.

Rev Dr Anne Townsend, 29 March. 2020 OBJ OBJ OBJ OBJ