

MarchNews October 2013

Dear Friends and Family,

Do you recognise the item in this picture ? We'd never seen one before coming to France. It is a coffee mill. You put the beans in the top, turn the handle and they are ground into powder, which you then put into your cafetière to make coffee.

Why this picture ? Well, we feel a bit like we're being put through the mill at this moment in time. As we have shared previously, we are feeling de-stabilised, that our place is no longer here in Villy en Auxois. Yet we have still no indication where God wants us to go, or what He

wants us to do.

Along with this sense of confusion over the future, we are also experiencing serious financial pressure. Many of you, we know, are also feeling the financial squeeze. But as we are only just surviving as it is, any change is serious. Financially we hang by a thread - which is worrying, wearing and exhausting.

Along with the above there are also work pressures. Sharon's employers have moved premises, which has made her daily commute longer, and more of a hassle, either by car or train + tram. She is also finding it hard being unvalued and unappreciated in her work. Stephen doesn't really enjoy his school bus job either. Being constantly mocked by primary school children for your pronunciation or wrong choice of word gets wearing after 5 years !

On the day that we had set aside to prepare this prayer letter, this was the Bible reading,

« Go ! I am sending you out like lambs amongst wolves .

Do not take a purse or bag or sandals ; and do not greet anyone on the road. » Luke 10v3-4, NIV

This reminded us that *fragility* is an inherent part of being involved in the mission of God. For some reason, it is only in the state of fragility – of being vulnerable and of possessing inadequate resources – that we can play our part His activity. It seems that in the economy of God, *if you won't be fragile, you can't be fruitful*. So perhaps our present difficult circumstances do make some kind of sense.

Going back to the coffee grinder, we note that there is no other way to make coffee than by grinding the beans. There is a necessary transformation required if the beans are to release their flavour,



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and so achieve their potential. This reminds us of the lessons we learned way back, following the “Experiencing God” course by Henry Blackaby. We learned God always involves us in His purposes with our *transformation* in view. In the first instance, that we might be capable of drawing closer to Him, and in the second instance, that we might be able to play our part in His mission activity in the world.

Please pray for us, friends, that we might respond positively to our current situation and allow the Spirit to accomplish His perfecting and polishing work in us, that we might know God more intimately and be more suited to the task He has for us.

We praise God that our boys continue to do well. Ben has final exams after Christmas, which are followed by a 6 month placement. Please pray that he would find a placement that would be good for him and may even lead to a job offer. We will need to come up with a deposit if he has to find yet another (number 6!) flat, should he need to move.

Joshua is also in finals’ year. However he has already decided to continue his studies. Please pray for him and for the possibility of finance towards his academic fees as they will not be free beyond degree level.

Caleb has settled into student life in Dijon. He has adapted well to living on his own in his student flat. He seems to be working hard and to be enjoying it so far, although he still would like to try out for the police force. We do give thanks and praise to God that we are not in debt. None of our boys has a student loan, and so far we have survived – which is a miracle of His provision!



Stephen has been contacting publishers about his “Jonah – The Epistle of Wild Grace” manuscript. So far one publisher has agreed to publish it, but this offer is not particularly attractive, since it would require us to contribute \$500 towards typesetting costs. There are several other publishers still actively considering the manuscript; in some cases it has passed through their ‘first sift’ and gone on to the next level. Please pray that we would get a publishing deal soon. The French version of the book “Jonas - L’êpître de la grâce déchaînée” is also advancing. Stephen finished a first complete draft a few weeks ago and will now start to meet weekly with a friend, Martine, who is helping to polish and perfect the French. This process will probably take another 6 to 12 months.

We have made contact with the new priest at Sombornon, explained our situation to him, and we hope to invite him for a meal in the next few weeks. We are also very pleased that our friend Father Yves has settled in well to his new parishes and been made very welcome. He came and ate with us last Sunday.

Perhaps we should close by telling you about last Saturday evening. There was a mass being celebrated in the church in our village. The people who usually organise everything were either ill or indisposed, so Sharon and I were asked to be responsible. This meant we had to open up the church, ring the bells, switch on the lights, operate the sound system, choose the songs, lead the singing, and find readers.

It was an awful night. The rain was lashing, the wind was howling. It was already getting dark when the mass started, so there were only about 25-30 of us gathered to worship and pray. Mostly old, mostly sick, some recently bereaved, some with spouses in hospital, some undergoing chemotherapy.

The focus of the mass was 'missions' and the priest came down into the congregation to deliver his homily. He spoke really well with a message targeted to his hearers; to bring them encouragement, to lift up their gaze, to challenge them, to comfort. During his preach, he identified us as missionaries, along with himself (he is an African priest). This was, I'm pretty sure, the first time any Catholic priest had publicly acknowledged us as missionaries.



It just so happened that this very day was the 13th anniversary of our arrival in France. Thank you all for your continued interest in us and for your prayer and financial support. We couldn't have done it without you!! Looking back, if we're honest, we wonder how much has been achieved? Perhaps we can identify some people who have made some spiritual progress, which we can hope is due to our involvement with them. We have also helped launch some evangelistic initiatives. But we think that if our ministry has been about anything, it has been more in line with what we did on Saturday night. We have encouraged and supported our Catholic brothers and sisters in the heroic task of being faithful. Hopefully our presence and service has helped them, encouraged them, blessed them. And maybe that is enough.

Grace and peace be with you.

Stephen, Sharon, Ben, Josh and Caleb