



# An online resurrection of faith

*by Peggy Pedersen*

**W**hen the early disciples heard the words, “Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15 ESV), they must have wondered how it could be possible. In their world, travel was slow and dangerous, communication methods limited. Yet in obedience, the early church sent out apostles to the known world to tell about the God who had come to earth to redeem mankind. Since then generations of missionaries have heeded our Lord’s call to spread the Gospel to every corner of the earth.

Today it is hard for us to remember (or imagine, if we’re younger) what it was like before television, cell phones and the Internet. Communication satellites allow TV signals to be beamed to any spot on earth, and yet I remember the first little blinking light that was the Soviet Union’s Sputnik crossing the night sky. During the recent Iranian election, we saw how difficult it is for even the most totalitarian regime to control electronic communications. Somehow the truth will get out—and into people’s minds and hearts!

All this presents amazing opportunities to communicate the Gospel and to change lives. Let me share my experience.

## **Lost in a maze of pathways**

Although raised in a Christian home, I wandered far from the truth. We live in a world teaching us that many paths, all equally valid, lead to God. Just as in a maze, however, only one true path leads to the centre.

Thirty years of my adult life went into trying first one religion then another—Catholicism, Judaism,

various Protestant sects and denominations. I ended up spending seven years living in ashrams practicing an Eastern religion and worshipping idols. Whenever I did open the Bible it always seemed to fall upon the words of

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Jeremiah or Hosea, condemning idolatry and calling for repentance. Knowing my practices were irreconcilable with Scripture, I shut my mind to the words and closed my heart.

I couldn’t quite give up Christmas and Easter, but they were empty of meaning without Christ. It seemed

the harder I tried to give my life to God, the farther away I felt. My Eastern religion believed in reincarnation, and purification by chanting and service. I asked my guru what the chances were of being able to purify oneself enough to reach God at the end of this life. He answered honestly: "It is almost impossible. We expect an individual to atone for his or her wrongs, an effort that may take many lifetimes." The problem was obvious. For every atoning action, I would also commit more sins. Thousands of lifetimes would not be enough. And what if there was only one?

Jesus offered Himself to atone for our sins, but I had lost faith in Him. Since I had denied Him and had sinned grievously against Him by breaking the commandments, how could He accept me back?

Yet I felt increasingly in my heart that without Christ to intercede for me, at the end of this life I would face the turned back of God and eternal separation from Him.

### Gospel e-mail

Nowadays you can learn almost anything on the Internet. Last spring I decided to learn Quenya, one of J.R.R. Tolkien's invented Elvish languages. To get some assistance I found an authority on the language, Petri Tikka, a young man living in Helsinki who



Petri Tikki

had posted some Quenya songs on YouTube along with his e-mail address. When I wrote him he told me he was studying to become a Lutheran pastor at the theological faculty of the University of Helsinki. I wrote back, putting my dilemma this way: Quenya appealed to me because it represented beauty and nobility, but my own efforts to become a better person had all

failed. I wrote him: "I feel I fall far short of loving God with all my heart and my neighbour as myself.... I really want to change this, but I don't know how."

My new friend Petri replied: "In your experience of falling short of the love that God wants, you have faced the predicament of us all. The more we try to reach for truth, beauty and love, the more we see our faults. As a Lutheran Christian, I have seen that this is what we are and that we can be no more. We are sinners. But as we say in Finnish hymns, Jesus is the 'friend of sinners' (*syntisten ystävä*). God loves us just the way we are. That is why Christ won victory over sin on the cross and through His resurrection gives a new life full of grace to all who believe that their sins are forgiven.

This forgiveness is yours, as it is mine, belonging to us all, the children of the Father."

That's all he said, but my whole life changed when I read his words. I believed I was forgiven, and faith reawakened in me. I believed Jesus had received me and reconciled me with my Father, and I did not first have to make myself worthy of His love, because he died for me while I was still a sinner. I read the words over and over: "This forgiveness is yours...." It was already mine!

My heart flooded with thanksgiving. I felt Heaven had come into my heart and I cried with repentance

and joy. Although I'd invested years of my life following another path, I happily threw it all away. I wrote my Finnish friend to tell him what had happened.

After telling me he had

prayed for me, he explained it was all God's gift: God had shown me I could not purify myself, He had given me faith and He would now complete the work He had begun in me. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9 ESV).

### Communicating grace in a techno-world

Though I had been to many Christian churches I had never understood grace. Now I know it was no accident I'd been led to contact Petri—it was the work of the Holy Spirit. This young man's willingness to share the Gospel with a total stranger halfway across the world, one who didn't even speak his native language, allowed me to hear the words of grace. God has promised that his Word never returns to Him empty but always accomplishes its purpose (Isaiah 55:11). Scripture says: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

It doesn't take a sermon. It only takes a word or two to find its way to a thirsty soul. The means is there, and English is now almost a universal language. The Internet crosses national, cultural, age and ethnic boundaries. A text message, an e-mail, a song on YouTube, a Facebook posting, a podcast, a website.... Remember, others like me are out there searching Google for answers.

Now I belong to a wonderful congregation. I hear the word of God preached purely every Sunday. I receive the grace of absolution and the Lord's Supper. But I know so many still wander outside the walls of the church. Before, I had never considered attending a Lutheran church and did not know what Lutherans believed. I drove by this church many times over the years and never thought to enter it until that Finnish Lutheran, thousands of miles away from my community and country, told me I was forgiven.

Who is waiting for *you* to tell them of God's forgiveness and grace?

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