

by Gary Deddo

Don't Cry for Jesus

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“Don't Cry for Jesus” was one of the most memorable sermons I have ever heard. It was given by Dr. Lewis Smedes at a Fuller Seminary chapel service in the US.

What was Professor Smedes getting at that struck me as being so profoundly right? He wanted us to see as clearly as possible that Jesus was no victim and that he didn't want us to pity him or feel sorry for him. I thought at the time, “What? How can we not feel sorry for him after all he went through for us?”

Professor Smedes had us consider two things: first, the actual way the story of Jesus is told to us by the New Testament writers; and second, a comparison of Jesus with the Greek tragic heroes like the demigod Achilles.

Let me first briefly recount for you the upshot of that comparison. The Greek gods, as great as they were, suffered often because of their own immoral activities and also of those involving the other gods. But their

greatest sufferings were tragic because they were due to circumstances beyond their own control. These gods were born with their various strengths and weaknesses. No one of them “had it all.” They were always born into situations not of their own making and often involving jealousies, revenge plots and power plays.

But it was their vulnerabilities that would inevitably lead to their most tragic suffering and defeat, like Achilles' lamentable heel. Were it not for the fact that despite all his armour, Achilles' heel was exposed and that his goddess mother was prevented by his unwitting mortal father from completing the daily rituals that would have made Achilles immortal, Paris' arrow would never have found its fatal target. In some versions of the myth, the god Apollo, for his own reasons, intervened and guided that arrow to pierce Achilles just at that one and only tiny unprotected point. How can you not feel sorry for Achilles? The unfairness of it all. Through no fault of his own, the greatest of all Greek warriors was brought down.

Though we certainly don't think of Jesus as a Greek tragic hero, I realize that his cross is often described in tragic terms. Jesus is often portrayed as a victim of circumstances that go all the way back to the fall of humanity. Jesus is sent to be our Saviour because humanity has rebelled and needs to be reconciled and regenerated if we are to share in God's eternal and triune fellowship and communion and for God's original intention at creation to be realized.

In the New Testament we find Jesus, the Son of God, living at a time when the Jewish nation is occupied by the pagan Romans. Among his own people, the Pharisees and Sadducees are involved in their own disputes with each other. Yet they manage to form an alliance to plot Jesus' arrest and execution. Closer to him, there is a traitor among his own disciples, Judas, who betrays him — with a kiss, no less. Jesus is betrayed first into the hands of the court of the high priests and then into the hands of Pilate, who is himself caught between the rival forces of the Emperor and the potentially riotous crowds. Finally, Jesus suffers the brutally cruel treatment of the Roman soldiers who strip, mock and whip him, then lead him to Golgotha, where he is put to death on the machinery of Roman execution: a cross.

Given these tragic circumstances surrounding Jesus' sacrifice, why should we not consider Jesus a tragic victim? Not because he didn't pay an unimaginably high price for us and our salvation. Not because he didn't actually suffer and die. But simply because he was no victim of those circumstances and because he had no fatal flaw!

The cost of our salvation was foreseen and anticipated before the foundations of the earth were even laid. God was not taken by surprise at the Fall nor by our subsequent need for costly deliverance. But our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, counted the cost (as it were) from all eternity and was ready and willing to gladly pay the price for our deliverance from evil and for our reconciliation. So the plan for creation was carried out knowing full well the price to be paid to put things right, for God's righteousness to be done.

Jesus knew why he had come and what his saving work would cost. His mission was freely chosen. He was freely sent and freely given by the Father out of their joint abounding love for the world. Jesus repeatedly told his disciples what he would have to

go through, even though they could not imagine his being so completely rejected by their religious leaders and political authorities that it would lead to his death. Jesus was anything but unaware of the path he would have to take to make all things new. When Pilate thinks he has to remind Jesus that he has the power of life and death over him, Jesus has to remind Pilate that he has no power except what has been allowed him by God, his Father (John 19:10-11).

In the garden, when one of his disciples takes it upon himself to defend Jesus with a sword, Jesus reminds them that all of his Father's angelic hosts are available to protect him at any moment if he were to call on them (Matthew 26:53). Jesus is no victim of fate, of circumstances, or of powers greater than himself. He is in charge. He goes forth to Jerusalem only when his hour has come—not sooner, not later.

Jesus' suffering is not the result of any large or small flaw in him. Far from it. There is not even a fleeting shadow of personal weakness evident in his confident

exercise of divine omnipotence as he fulfills his redemptive mission. Rather, it is by means of his strength and authority operating in full concert with his Father that he arrives at the right moment to exert saving power over sin, evil and death itself. His act of self-giving is a work of deliberate might based on the strength of his holy love. Jesus is

no tragic hero, but the willing, omnipotent, Lord and Saviour.

Perhaps most astonishing are Jesus' words spoken on the way to Golgotha, even as he bore the heavy weight of the cross-beam of his own crucifixion. Beholding the women standing by, no doubt exceedingly distraught and anguished, welling up from the depths of his compassion, Jesus found the strength to tell them something they and we need to know: "Daughters of Jerusalem, *don't weep for me*" (Luke 23:28).

Jesus does not want us to pity him as a hapless victim who suffers because it couldn't be avoided, because it was inevitable, destined by forces he could not resist. He is not looking for our pity—he trod that road, the Via Dolorosa as it is called, on purpose, by divine design. He intentionally took that journey and nothing, not even torture at the violent hands of human wickedness, could stop him. We may weep for ourselves, if we must, that is, be sorrowful for our sins. But Jesus didn't come



looking to gather our tears. Rather, his costly love calls for giving him our thanks, our praise, our gratitude, our love, our absolute trust and loyalty — indeed our very lives in eternal worship.

Jesus not only freely but also gladly gave his life that we might have resurrected life in him. So the author of Hebrews sums it up: “For the joy set before him, he endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus was no reluctant Savior, but the conquering Servant-King of all creation. That’s the good news that Professor Smedes preached, and from that moment on, I saw that I could no longer think, preach or teach as if Jesus was a victim that we should feel sorry for.

(the above is an excerpt from Gary’s full article, which can be found at <http://www.gci.org/jesus/dontcry>)

Camp Hope Revisited

by Cliff Neill

You know, we all hope for something in life — we hope for a wife or a husband, a better job, a wage increase, good exam results, nice weather for a picnic or a barbeque and on and on it goes.

You’ll also notice of course, that hope is always about the future, about the things we don’t have, because if we had them there is no reason to hope, is there? It’s a looking ahead and a great longing for something — it’s a waiting time!

When the idea of hope enters my head my thoughts go immediately to the Atacama Desert, 45 kilometres north of the regional capitol of Copiapo in northern Chile, where, on the 5th of August 2010 there was a cave-in at the 121 year old San Jose’ copper-gold mine, trapping 33 miners. The buried men who became known as “Los 33” (“The 33”) were trapped 700 metres (2,300 feet) underground for 69 days.

But most of all my thoughts go to the families of those men because they set up a camp at the mine’s entrance and vowed to stay there until their love ones were brought out alive — they named that place “Camp Hope” or in their own language, “*Campo Esperanza!*” I will remember the faith and hope and the prayers of those families for a very long while; because they displayed those qualities of faith and hope quietly, unashamedly and with great dignity for the duration of this horrendous trial, trusting God for the safe return of all those 33 men who were trapped in darkness.

I also remember with great clarity their smiling faces and their undying confidence that their dear ones would once again be held in a strong embrace, once again to be a part of their lives when this storm was over.

A most important part of this vigil is that these families helped each other. Before the cave-in most of these families didn’t know one another, but as one of those Chilean mothers told a reporter; “Now I see them and we are one family. We worry, talk and fight for each other.” What happened here was — 33 families became one!

I believe that the whole world was glued to TV screens during this nail biting 69 days; not only that but mining experts from around the globe descended on that place with equipment, help and advice — even the expertise of NASA was involved! Thankfully after those 69 days of faith and hope, all 33 men were brought safely to the surface, one by one, on the 13th of October 2010.



Their strong hope was most certainly an anchor for their souls. In the ancient world, the anchor was a symbol of hope; something that was sure and steadfast, ships ride out storms at anchor—a vessel clings to this large piece of hooked metal that digs deeply into the seabed and keeps all on board from death upon the rocks. Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher once said; “Wealth is a weak anchor; fame is still weaker. What then are the anchors which are strong? Wisdom, great-heartedness, courage—these are the anchors which no storm can shake.”

And I'm sure you'll agree that this group of 33 families — that became one — displayed all of those qualities for every cliff hanging moment of their trial but I suspect not of and by themselves. As one of the psalmists wrote; "My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Hope is vital in the midst of disaster, hope will stand up in the storm, hope will be defiant, hope will be tenacious and refuse to become despondent but on the other hand, hope is not always strong; sometimes it is small, trembling and fragile because when we choose hope we are going out on a limb but there is always a place for this small, whispering, and gentle hope.

There is no doubt in my mind that faith and hope are precious gifts from



God, and that the families at that mine entrance had them in abundance. I suspect that their loved ones, those trapped miners had a portion of them too.

The wise old apostle Paul writing to the church at Rome passed on this blessing to them he wrote; "Now may *the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope* by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15: 13 NRSV italics mine).

Notice the blessing is to *abound in hope*; he means to have enough to spare, a supply that is overflowing, excessive beyond measure and I guess that kind of sums up the gift that those beautiful people were given as they waited at the entrance to a mineshaft in the Atacama Desert in 2010!

Seven Images of Salvation

by Michael Morrison

The New Testament uses a wide range of images to express the richness of the work of Christ. We may describe these images as analogies, models or metaphors. Each gives part of the picture:

- Ransom: a price paid to achieve someone's freedom. The emphasis falls on the idea of being freed, not the nature of the price.
- Redemption: "buying back," or for a slave, buying freedom.
- Justification: being put right with God, as if declared by a court to be in the right.
- Salvation: deliverance or rescue from a dangerous situation. The word can also suggest restoration to wholeness, a healing.
- Reconciliation: the repair of a broken

relationship. God reconciles us to him. He acts to restore a friendship, and we respond to his initiative.

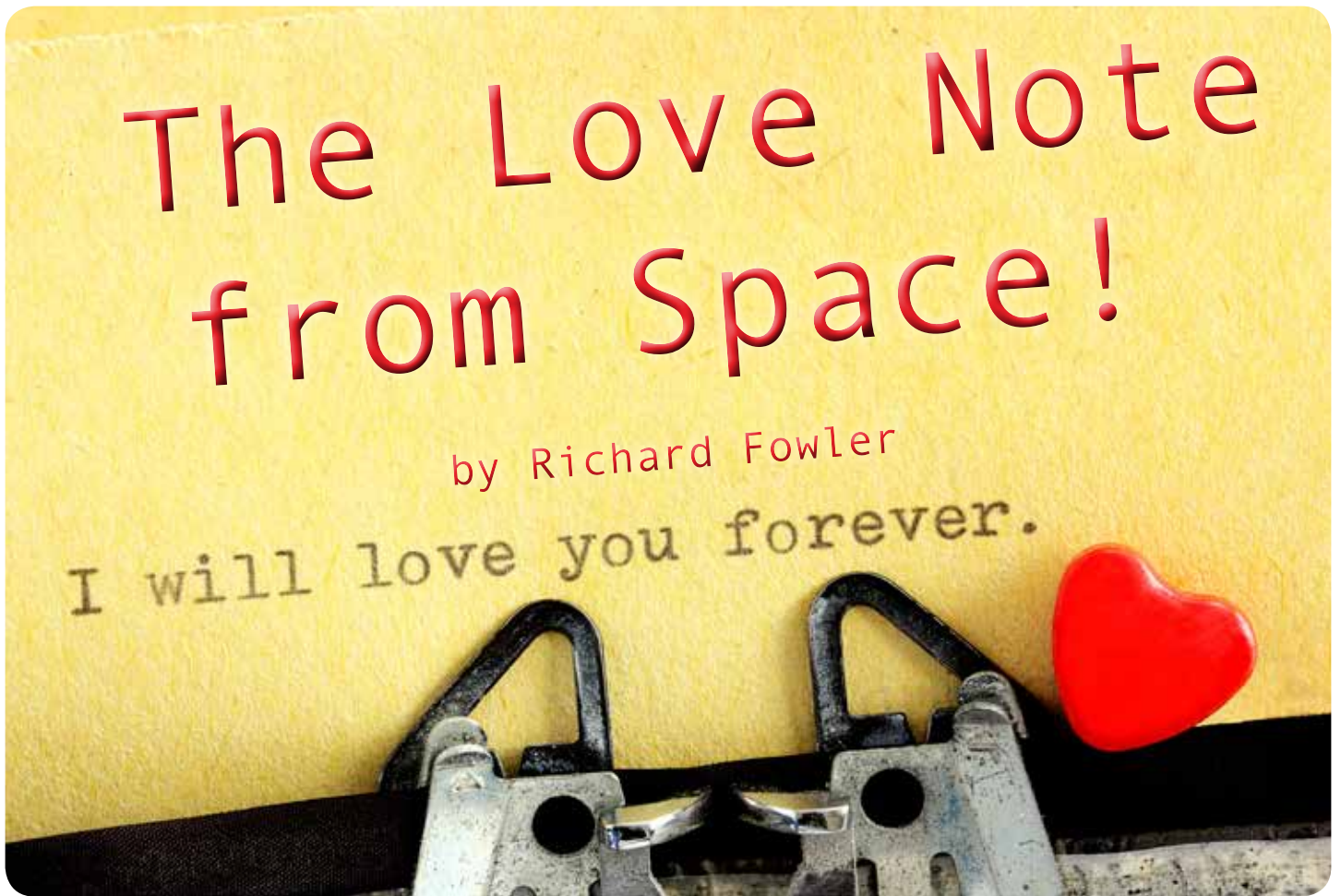
- Adoption: making us legal children of God. Faith brings about a change in our status, from outsider to family member. The phrase "born again" suggests a different way to enter the family.
- Forgiveness: This can be seen in two ways. In legal or financial terms, forgiveness is like the cancellation of a debt. In terms of personal relationship, forgiveness means the setting aside of personal hurt or injury.

(Adapted from Alister McGrath, *Understanding Jesus*, pp. 124-135)

The Love Note from Space!

by Richard Fowler

I will love you forever.



Have you ever heard that internal voice, challenging you to take the paper you just screwed up and throw it across the room into that enticingly open bin?

There you are, some metres away. You decide to get the undivided attention of those around you to witness this marvel of skill and accuracy. Once everybody's eyes are engaged in this peacock-like show, you decide to launch this missile with a graceful glide. All eyes follow its trajectory, and you feel a sense of anticipation rise in the room. As the missile nears its destination, colleagues rise out of their chairs for a better view, with cheers and applause at the ready. But, then, you realise the inevitable, and your heart sinks: it's going to miss, and as the screwed-up paper bounces next to the bin, the collective tension in the room deflates.

Yet, this near display of precision and accuracy pales into astronomical insignificance when compared to what the world got to witness in July of 2015. Imagine throwing that screwed-up paper and trying to hit a target some 3.7 billion miles away – the average distance from the sun of our downgraded plutoid, Pluto. Well, that's exactly what we did! Except we threw, not a screwed-

up piece of paper but a grand piano sized package of technology known as the 'New Horizon' at a cost of £460 million. It took just under 10 years to get there, helped by a 52,000mph push from Jupiter...don't you just love gravity!

It is truly amazing what man is able to do: send a hurtling body of metal into the deepest, darkest depths of one of the loneliest places in our orbiting solar system, to meet a target travelling at thousands of miles an hour. If you were to take the same lonely journey in a car travelling at 70mph, it would take you just over 6000 years.



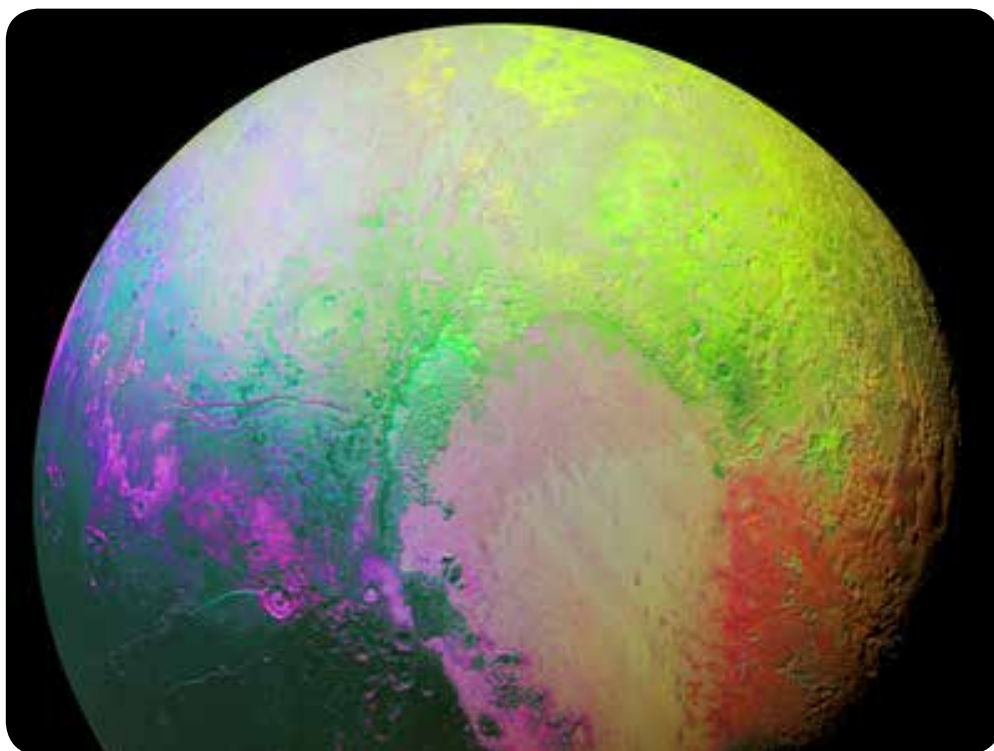
And what a treat we saw when we got there! Emerging from the darkness was an image that was both surprising as it was poetic: Pluto's unseen love note hidden from humanity's eyes until now.

What was it? An enormous and accurately 'drawn' heart shape onto the surface of what is now humbly called asteroid number 134340'. It reminded me of some lyrics sung by Rihanna: 'We found love in a hopeless place'.

And that's just the point...we did! With this heart splashed across Pluto's surface, there is something

to be learned. You see, all this time Pluto has been carrying a metaphorical message for us – a message that has taken probing the darkest part of our solar system to uncover. Maybe we could look at it this way: no matter how dark it gets in our lives, no matter how lonely we feel, no matter how tough things become in life; God’s love is still present, God’s compassion towards us never fails!

In fact this message, believe it or not, has been around for centuries. This message written on the surface of Pluto was actually written on the pages of a very special book:



“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” even the night shall be light about me...How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with You.” (Psalm 139:7-11, 17-18.)

David, the warrior King and psalmist, who wrote this, understood one thing: that, how we sometimes feel is not always reflected in how God feels. Simply put, no matter how lonely or difficult life gets, God is always there, ever present; His wanting us to succeed is never failing.

This is not to say that we will not have difficulties in our lives or that every problem will be solved by understanding the reality of God’s compassion towards us – of course not. But knowing this reality will help us develop the mindset that encourages us to pursue purpose, even when it’s hard, even if it means accepting discomfort in our lives. This mindset can be found in Pluto’s message; not a sentimental heart measuring some 1200 miles across, but an intimation that tells us that God is there for us, that He loves us, and that He will not leave us when we face our darkest, loneliest and toughest times. It is a love that we don’t have to travel across the solar system for, nor one that can be measured!

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Queen Elizabeth “Grateful for God’s Steadfast Love”

The *Servant Queen* and the *King She Serves* will mark Queen Elizabeth’s forthcoming 90th birthday and offers “rare insights into her personal thoughts and Christian faith.”



Queen Elizabeth will celebrate her 90th birthday on 21 April with a clear statement of faith.

“I have been – and remain – very grateful to you for your prayers and to **God for his steadfast love**. I have indeed seen his faithfulness”, she says in the foreword of a book on her Christian faith.

The Servant Queen and the King She Serves offers “rare insights into the Queen’s personal thoughts and Christian faith.”

In her comments, the Queen refers to the changes she has seen in her life, which has made her the longest-reigning monarch in British history. “The extent and pace of change has been truly remarkable”, she writes. “We have witnessed triumphs and tragedies.”

Elizabeth also alludes to the current conflicts in the Middle East saying that the world is now experiencing “terrible suffering on an unprecedented scale.

Queen has “clear dependance on Christ”

The book has been published by three Christian organisations: the Bible Society, HOPE and the London

Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC).

Co-author Mark Greene (LICC), said: “As I’ve been writing this book and talking about it to friends, to family who don’t know Jesus, to my Jewish barber, I’ve been struck how very interested they are to discover more about the Queen’s faith.”

“The Queen has served us all her adult life, with amazing consistency of character, concern for others and a clear dependence on Christ. The more I’ve read what she’s written and talked to people who know her, the clearer that is”, he added.

A talking point in your neighbourhood

The interim chief executive of the Bible Society, Paul Woolley, said: “This book bears witness to the Queen’s faith and the centrality of her Christian faith in her life and her reign. It goes into detail about her speeches and it often is drawing on her own words to give an account of how significant the Christian faith is to all that she represents.”



He added that the three agencies wanted to make the book widely available so that it would “become a talking point in your neighbourhood and in your office.” They hope that Christians and churches will buy copies of the book to give away as an evangelistic tool.

Sources: Bible Society, Anglican Journal, Christian Post

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Speaking of Life:



The Expanding Universe

A hundred years ago, Albert Einstein announced his theory of general relativity, changing the world of science forever. One of the most groundbreaking discoveries he unveiled is that our universe is constantly expanding. This staggering fact is a great reminder not just of how large our universe is, but of something the Psalmist said –

“For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the East is from the West, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:11-12 KJV).

This is the incredible reality of God’s grace provided to us through the sacrifice of his only son, our Lord Jesus. The Psalmist’s wording is no mistake. “As far as the east is from the west” is meant to stretch our minds and give us the mental image of a distance beyond our own imagination. Because just as it’s difficult to imagine anything beyond the size of the physical universe, so it should be even more difficult to imagine anything greater than our redemption in Christ, especially when we consider the magnitude of what was redeemed.

You see, our sin put an immovable gulf between God and us. But through Christ’s work on the cross, all of that changed. That gulf between God and us was reversed. God has in Christ reconciled the world to himself. And we are now invited to draw near to him as family, and to live in right relationship with the Triune God for all eternity. And he provides his Spirit to empower us to turn to him and surrender our lives to him so that the life of Jesus may be lived out in us.



So the next time you stare up at the night sky, remember that God’s mercy surpasses the limits of our vast universe, and that even the furthest distances we know are still tiny compared to his immense love for us.

I’m Joseph Tkach,
Speaking of LIFE.

Speaking of Life is now on TV! It is used by UCB (United Christian Broadcasters) in between longer programmes and is aired on UCB on Thursdays and Fridays between 7.15 - 7.30 am and between 1.45 and 2.00pm, on Saturdays between 6.45 and 7.00 am., and on Sundays between 1.45 and 2.00 pm. These timings may vary.

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