

G'day Praying Partners,

Thank you to all who prayed for our mini show this past weekend! We can't wait to share how we saw God work.

If you don't mind, I'd like to take you on this "journey" with us, so that you can get the full impact of just how God blessed over the weekend. As some of you will recall, we began this "mini show" outreach probably ten years ago. It came about because during this period, Melbourne puts on the Melbourne Show (like our state fairs). It is very costly and we came up with the idea of doing our "Malcolm Creek Mini Show" as an outreach to the community – especially for those who can't afford to take their children to the Show. Our thought was it would be a great way to share the Gospel, be a blessing to the community and promote the church. Fast forward to 2019. That year we had no idea what was coming – or that it would be our last show for 3 years. We did plan to do one in 2020...and 2021...but with Covid we were under strict lockdowns at that time (in fact, we became the most locked-down city in the world). During this time, the school where we meet got a new principal. Even though the previous principal was not a believer, he was so supportive of everything we did, seeing it from the perspective of being a benefit to the school community. Unfortunately, the new principal does not feel the same. She required us to submit a proposal to her, which in turn she would share with school "leadership" to determine if we would be allowed to proceed with something we'd been doing for years. It took her over a month to get back to us (basically about 4 weeks before the show was to take place). She limited the number of kids that were allowed to attend (which we weren't expecting a huge turnout anyway). In the past, we had compiled a data base of kids that have come to our 2 outreaches – now it was 3 years old and completely out of date. The principal "allowed" us to advertise in the school newsletter, but it was all digital now – before there had been a paper copy with a big advertisement in it. Now, it was so difficult to find that, in all honesty, we doubt anyone even saw it. It all seemed so impossible – and a bit disheartening, to say the least

But, we persevered (and prayed a lot!) with the plans and began the preparations, knowing God would honour our work for Him. Our theme was "Under the Sea". You'll have to go to our blogpost –ernstfamilydownunder.blogspot.com to see the pictures! The week before the mini show, 6 of our families came down with Covid! In Melbourne, if you contract Covid you are required to isolate for 5-7 days (depending on severity). In a church of around 75 people, 6 families are a lot! We were reminded that, although we had been faithfully praying for so many aspects of the show, we had neglected to pray for health! We earnestly sought God's face for that week that no one else would contract it. God was so incredibly faithful to ensure that was the case (although a couple of people were still quite ill and not able to help out –including the lady that was over our decorations!).

As part of our proposal to the school, we said that we would need time on Saturday to set up. As it happened, they booked in someone from 11-1 and 4-6 in the room where we meet, and then someone from 6:30-11 in the gym where we were holding the games. That left very little time to set up. We were there for a couple of hours doing what we could. The decision was made to come early on Sunday, set up what we could, then complete the rest after church (the show started at 2:30). Rob and I walked in on Sunday morning to a disaster. The Seventh Day Adventist church that had rented the gym the night before had allowed, we assume, their children to pretty much destroy everything we had accomplished on Saturday. We put out a call for help and many of our congregation showed up early to get it put back together – plus get more done. I imagine you are thinking the same thing we were – obviously the enemy did not want this mini show to go forward! In all our years of doing this, we have NEVER had this much to overcome. Everyone was rejoicing over what was going to occur knowing that if the enemy was working this hard, it was going to be awesome!

We are incredibly blessed with our church family in that when we have an event like this, there is almost 100% turn out to help. Some couldn't stay for the whole event, but helped out with set up. Some had to leave before we cleaned up. But everyone had a part in being God's hands and feet on the day. After much planning, preparation and prayer, we opened the doors at 2:30. We were awestruck to have around 50 children and around 20 parents show up on the day! It was incredible. I had put together a script for the gospel presentation – we had someone interview Jonah about his experience “under the sea” and used that to then share the gospel with those 70+ people who would probably never set foot in a church. The kids loved it! It was somewhat interactive so that they could be a part of Jonah's experience in the belly of that big fish! We then turned the kids loose to play the games and enjoy the day. During the show, one of the mum's approached Rob about the gospel presentation. She is from Belarus and attends a Russian Orthodox church. Rob had a good discussion with her about the gospel, shared a tract and church information with her as well. She told Rob that she cannot approach her priest – it's just not allowed – so she was thankful to have that conversation with him. My Muslim friend who always brings her kids to our outreaches absolutely loved the Jonah skit – please continue to pray that God would work in her life and that of her children. All the children receive a gospel tract and invitation to children's church as part of their goody bags. Pray along with us that God would take these many seeds that are sown and produce fruit for His kingdom!

Whew! Sorry for the long email but we SO wanted you to get a small taste of the ups and downs that came before the outreach – and the incredible blessing that occurred on the day! Our church family learned so much about our faithful God – and we are excited about what He is going to do with the seeds sown on the day. “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:11. We hold on to God's promise in Galatians 6:9, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” No matter what discouragements the enemy throws your way, don't give up! The harvest IS coming – how incredible is it that God allows us to be a small part of it?!

Shining the Light Down Under,

Rob and Jackie

