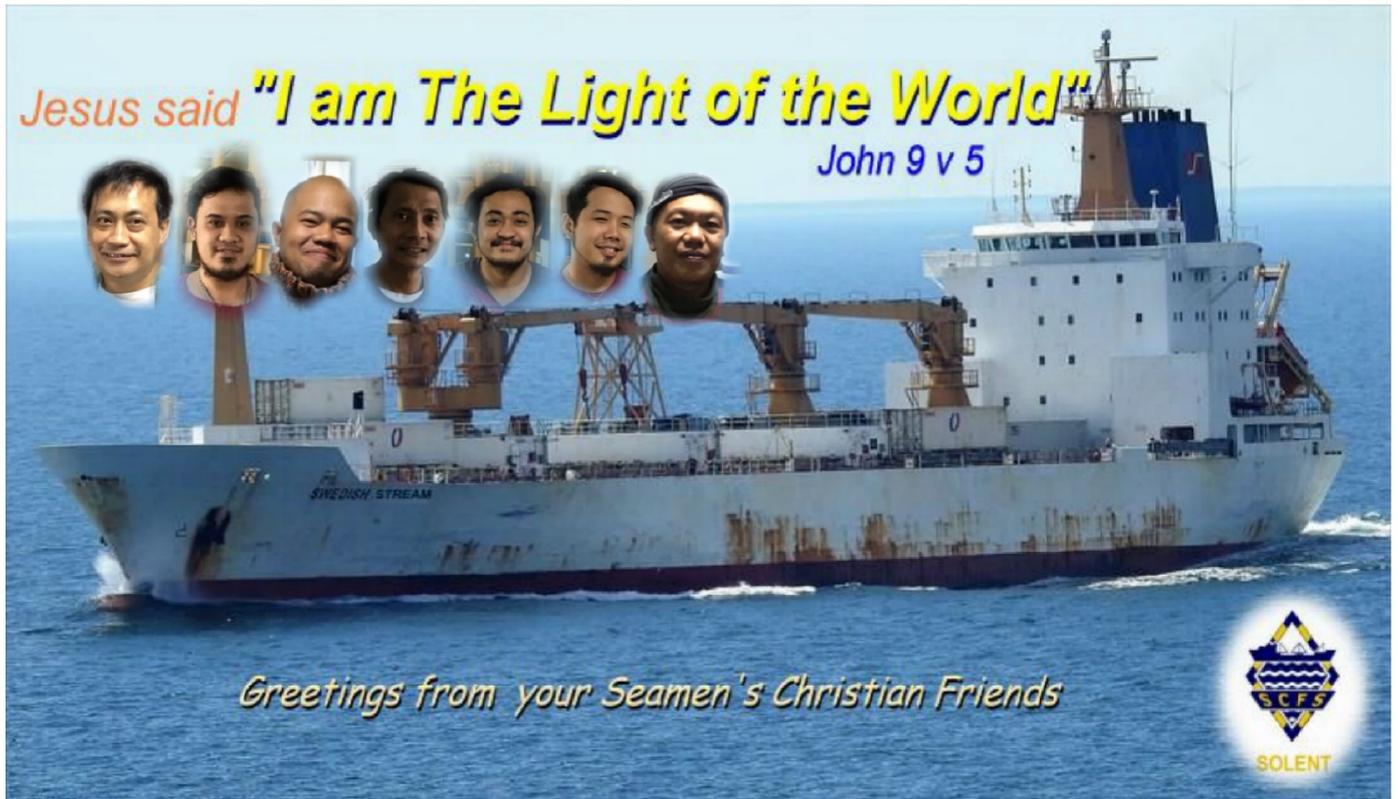


SCFS Solent

'Behold, I have set before you an open door which no one can shut!' *Rev 3 v 8*



I have been 'pushing doors' at Portsmouth Commercial Docks for 4 or 5 weeks, but seemingly to little effect, with the standard answer being that they were operating a closed gangway policy, where not even the ship's agents were allowed onboard and only essential workers were allowed into the Docks. I had kept up a weekly telephone conversation with the Compliance Manager at the docks, reminding him of the seafarer's needs of someone else to talk to to aid mental health! About 3 weeks ago he called me to say that if I had an invitation from the Master of the vessel and was prepared to wear mask & gloves and observe social distancing, then he would allow me into the docks for 30 minutes, and on to the ship for 20 minutes! This was a fresh ray of light, but there were still barriers. Two times I wrote to the Captains and received the same answer - no visitors allowed on the ship. I was particularly challenged by Theo's encouraging statement - 'we must visit' and Colin's quote 'If you aim for the top of the tree you will never climb it - you must aim for the stars', which I took to mean there is a Captain higher than the Captain of the vessel to whom I must present the problem! The third email therefore took a slightly different tack. I asked The Master's permission to come to the bottom of the gangplank to meet an old friend - the Bosun Eduardito - and pass

on a few gifts to the crew. This brought a positive response, so yesterday morning, feeling really inadequate yet full of thankfulness to The Lord, I set out. Edwina took me down to the Hovercraft, 15 minutes to cross the Solent, 10 minutes on the bus into the centre of Portsmouth, a quick trip into Tesco's for a few choccy bics, toiletries etc then walking on to the docks (about 1 mile). Got on all the gear, and the first question at security was 'I see your name on the list, what's your authority to come?' I was tempted to tell him my real authority, but what came out was the name of the Compliance manager! 'You are the favoured one' he said, to which I agreed! I got to the ship and was invited to come to the top of the gangplank, and there were soon 3 officers (Russian) and 4 seamen (Filipino) greeting me and asking questions. The Bosun Ed was sent for and we went into a little room for a chat for about 20 mins. He is such a bright believer and faithful witness aboard that ship - it was a tonic to me to talk with him and encourage him in The Lord. As I left to go there was opportunity to pray with about 4 or 5 crew members suitably spread out in a circle - it's amazing how big the area of the deck at the top of the gangplank can become! So, I left the docks, thanking The Lord and stopped outside to take off mask, gloves, big coat etc cos the sun was really hot & so was I. Just got them half off when someone from inside the docks shouted through the railings, 'They want you back on the ship, they were beckoning to you but you didn't see!' Back on with all the gear, back through security, back to the ship. It's the Chief Engineer, (Russian from Vladivostok) desperate for several pairs of socks and not allowed to leave the ship, what could I do? Hot foot it to Sainsbury's (1/2 mile from docks) buy socks, back to docks, security let me in(!), back to ship, 2nd time up ladder, grateful Chief Engineer and opportunity to speak to 4 more crew who had come on watch. Finally leave ship for second time, stop outside docks to remove gear, someone calls again from inside. This time it's the Compliance manager who has come out specially, 'How did it go?'

Lord, all your ways are wonderful and thank you for the immense privilege to be Your unprofitable servants.

The Lord bless and encourage you all.

Peter

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June 2020