

FOWEY FABLES – NO 10 - MAY 2005

Dear Friends

As Jonah sat in a puddle of rotting seaweed in the stomach of the ‘sea monster’, he had time for reflection.(Jon.2) He had at first made a bad decision to run away from God’s plan to make him a missionary. He had then made a good decision to have the ship’s crew throw him over the side so that he might die to save them from the storm. In doing so he had become a picture of Jesus, willing to die to save us, and wanting us to die with Him. Shortly he would again be an illustration of Jesus in resurrection.(Matt.12:39-40) As he thought about his situation he forgot about his past mistakes and his present discomforts because the Holy Spirit filled his mind with His word. In the space of a few short verses he recalled 17 different Psalms as well as bits of Isaiah, Job and Lamentations. The Spirit wound all this scripture into a simple theme – he was in trouble, God knew, cared and was listening, and all he had to do was to sacrifice and be thankful. Sacrifice for Jonah was obviously not going to be an animal offered on a fire, for environmental reasons! It would be the kind of sacrifice Paul talked about in Rom.12:1,2 in which we offer our bodies, cleansed by the blood of Christ in the expectation that instead of forcing us into the world’s shape we should be changed from the inside by His thinking becoming ours. Then and only then can we be thankful for all He is and how He will deal with our situation exactly as He chooses.

As most of you will have gathered we at Fowey Lodge are in deep trouble though still on dry land. In January NZQA informed us that our course approval was being cancelled because we still refuse to measure the outcome of our teaching by examinations. They will not accept that Christian teaching is about life change not head change, and that leadership is about service not climbing the ladder. They refuse to accept Jesus command not to judge one another or Paul’s urging to examine ourselves before God, not to examine each other. This moment has been coming for 14 years since NZQA began in 1991 when we challenged the idea that the State could dictate the teaching of the church. Progressively the opposition to Christian principles has grown so that we now face an ideologically hostile bureaucracy.

The only reason we have persevered with NZQA is because their approval is the one route to student visas for overseas students. They have caused us to waste much money, time and energy but we have believed it has been a battle we had to fight not just for our students but for the freedom of the gospel in New Zealand. Many other Bible schools have given up on a process which was too hard and expensive.

A few days before Easter our appeal against cancellation of course approval was heard in Wellington before 3 members of the board of NZQA. Eight of us went down, with a great sense of God’s presence, to face an aggressive, restrictive and brief hearing. Only 5 of our group were allowed to speak. One person put it beautifully when he asked the committee how they would assess kindness. Our lawyer talked about how Jesus might have measured His disciples at the first Easter and reminded the board that they would have failed assessment when they all ran away at Jesus’ arrest but that Jesus persevered with them for a further 40 days and then gave them not the Great Certificate but the Great Commission! We had a marvellous

opportunity to spell out the uniqueness of the Christian message as it relates to education.

Two weeks ago we were informed that our appeal had been rejected. One week ago NZQA told us that student visas would immediately be revoked though students would be given until 12th June to find alternative schools or leave the country.

At the beginning of this week we met Ross Robertson, MP for Manukau, who is a Christian. He understood well and was very sympathetic. He took our file to Wellington to present to the Minister of Education asking for the policy which affects us to be changed. While the matter is with the Minister everything goes on hold. If this approach fails we still have the option of requesting a judicial review by the High Court.

We have constantly reminded one another and the students that we have two choices, pray or worry, based on Matt.6:5-34 and Phil.4:6. As we pray God convinces us not to allow the government to conform us to their model but to expect Him to work miraculously, starting with our thinking, to bring about a better programme than ever. Our first responsibility is to our students who are understandably nervous about their futures. Some are looking at other schools but they would face substantial fees. If God so leads them they have our full support. Most are waiting and trusting. Many are meeting together to pray. That is wonderful.

For the moment we have postponed the planned course in Fiji to be on hand to make decisions and give support to the team and the students.

Like Jonah we feel at times that we are sitting inside a bureaucratic monster which is trying to digest us! Like Jonah we do not know what God is going to do but we are thankful we are in His hands. We could be resurrected to continue our programme within days. We may be led in new directions – like Ninevah. We are prepared to go back to a basic 3 month programme so that students can come on visitors' visas. We are seriously looking at having a school in Fiji particularly for those who have trouble getting into NZ from, for example, Africa and the Pacific. We are considering running short courses in developing countries and then following up with internet based teaching.

Nick has had three months working at a Christian camp south of Sydney. He is back for a couple of weeks before going to Fiji to explore future possibilities at Muanicula and then join Ron Russell on Dayspring III for outreach to the islands of Wallis and Futuna. After that he will be back to NZ for our July ski camp and to take an entrance examination for medical school in Australia. Pete continues to flourish at St Kentigern College. Christine is making a huge difference to our management in the practice and the Lodge. Together we will visit Fiji as soon as we are free to do so. I am planning to go to India for the second half of October for ministry in Andhra Pradesh.

God has continued to develop an amazing team at the Lodge of teachers, tutors and practical helpers. Their support through tough times has been brilliant. We do not feel alone in the sea monster. We count you as part of that team.

Our love in Christ

Tony and Christine