

FOWEY FABLES 5 – OCTOBER 2003

Sometimes we become so used to a familiar Bible story that we miss the obvious. Most of us have heard preachers (or been the preacher) who went on about the hypocrisy of the men who dragged the woman, but not her partner in adultery, before Jesus demanding that He condemn her, in John chapter 8. We have oozed self-righteous satisfaction at the prospect of the accusers slipping away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until not one of them remained, because not one of them was without sin, whether of the same kind as the woman or a different variety. We have smiled at the suggestion that when Jesus wrote in the dust, He may have been inscribing the names of ladies known too well to his very religious audience. And we may have missed the fact that the story has a good outcome. What began badly ended well with an immoral woman standing alone in the presence of Jesus, expecting His judgement but receiving instead His urging to turn forever away from her immorality and to know His forgiveness.

All too often, as the Christian church, we see ourselves with a mission to change the behaviour of the world around us. When we try to carry that mission out by criticism, condemnation and attempted correction all we succeed in doing is hardening the attitudes of those we seek to reform, who see our sin as clearly as we think we see theirs. How does God change our behaviour from the heart and in a way which lasts? By bringing us to stand alone in the presence of the Lord Jesus. All too often those who need His loving, transforming work in their messy lives cannot see or hear Him because of the noisy crowd who hang around Him, getting in the way. The men in this story did the right thing unintentionally. They left the woman with Jesus to meet Him and hear from Him.

What they eventually did unwittingly, we could do deliberately. Why not simply introduce people to Jesus and move out of the way so that lovingly, patiently and gently He can show them what His death on the cross has done to deal with the past and His resurrection and indwelling to change the present and the future? He will then alter behaviour in His way and His time from the inside out. We bring people into the presence of Jesus by telling them from the scriptures of Him, by showing them a radiant example of Him in action as we care sensitively and uncritically for them.

We have had some great opportunities to bring people into the presence of Jesus in the last few months. In July Nick led us in another teenage camp, this time at Mt Ruapehu. Twenty-four high energy young people skied all over the mountain by day and learned about Jesus by night. Surprising in three active days in the snow no-one suffered any injury. It was not until we were filling up with gas to come home that we hit trouble when someone inadvertently filled Nick's vehicle with diesel. An hour later with the tank drained and correctly refilled we drove off, only to receive a cell phone call half an hour down the road from the camper who had been in the toilet when the vehicles departed.

The same month Solo and Akanisi Tuibua took a team of our Korean students together with their children for ten days of outreach in Fiji. They stayed at Muanicula, our little centre, and put on programmes in villages and schools. Despite

the language barrier their friendly, loving service spoke loud and clear. The presence of Jesus was apparent. There is great enthusiasm on both sides for another visit.

In September there was another outreach, this time to Tokoroa, a small town in the middle of the North Island struggling with major unemployment and all the social problems that go with it. We were there at the invitation of the church pastored by Luke and Caroline Iwunze who have worked very faithfully in Tokoroa for 8 years. They originally came to Bible School from Nigeria 12 years ago with 4, now grown to 6 kids. The church has bought a disused shopping centre and done much to convert it into a place for demonstrating the presence of Jesus in worship and teaching, in a Christian school, and in plans for it to be a gym and coffee bar for those of all ages with time on their hands. The task was huge so we went there to help in practical maintenance, in meeting and encouraging the Christians, and in programmes to introduce people to Jesus.

Late in July we had a great visit from Jim Bird whom many of you will remember from his days with Precept. He is now involved with Hope for the Heart, a ministry which has used an inductive approach to draw out of the Bible a Christ-centred approach to some 97 difficult problems which keep people from enjoying the presence of Jesus. This is brilliant material either to use in counselling, or to encourage people in trouble to work through for themselves. They have made all their material available to us on paper and CD so that we can post or e-mail any of the studies to those who want them. Let us know if you want a list of topics available.

The last couple of months have seen some big changes. Nick is now officially an adult. We had a wonderful evening to celebrate his first 21 years to which many people who have been important in his life came. Pete is now officially a teenager. We marked this historic day by helping him fulfil a dream. He had his first flying lesson out over Ponui Island with Nick and me in the back seats. I threw up for most of the trip – but I would not have missed the experience (of flying with Pete) for the world. Among other big changes has been my resignation from the University so that I can concentrate on what happens at the Lodge. I am enjoying my freedom though the last seven years have been a fascinating challenge to try to make doctors more aware of the presence of Jesus, as well as better doctors. There is one more big change. The old front hedge has gone, causing some people to drive past because they no longer recognise the place. Something new and better is rising in its place...

There continue to be major challenges needing the presence of Jesus. The Manukau City Council are taking us to the Environment Court to try to close the Bible School down because of the number of outside students who park in the street. Our registration with the NZQA which allows overseas students to obtain student visas is still unsettled though we are working hard with guidance from Dick Park to meet their demands if those do not conflict with our calling.

In November we have a special weekend. On the Friday evening, 14th, Chris Cowgill from the United States, will put on another concert of gospel music in the hall. On the following day, 15th, we have planned a gala day to raise sponsorship for kids who could not otherwise afford Water Weeks, our January camps. Come and join us!

Be sure to enjoy His presence! Our warmest love, Tony and Christine