

## ***Fowey Fables – No.31                      March 2013***

From the point of view of the Roman Imperial Justice Department, Paul was a serial re-offender. Prison did not seem to have cured him. Conditions this time were tougher than ever. He had been before many judges who had passed responsibility to another court. Sometimes in the past he had been released for a time. This time he knew he was at the end of the journey.(II Tim.4:6-8) When Paul wrote his second letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, to encourage him for a time when he would no longer have Paul to look to for advice, he had much to say about suffering. By now Paul was an expert in suffering and its place in Christian service. Like many others he had struggled with its meaning in Christian experience. What is the point of suffering? Why does a loving, all powerful God allow it? Why does He not protect from harm those who trust Him?

He used three simple illustrations to answer the questions we too have about, “why do we suffer?” In II Tim.2:1-7 he urges Timothy to discover ‘strong grace’ which he will find in Christ. He encourages Timothy to teach this life changing message to those who will consistently receive it by faith and will therefore teach others. If they do the whole world will be reached and many transformed. But in the process we will be given a hard time as Paul well knew. He compared the experience to that of the soldier, the athlete and the farmer. Paul wrote about warfare in a time in history when being a soldier was less morally complicated, before the days of drones, collateral damage and friendly fire. When he compared the Christian to a soldier in Ephesians chapter 6 he might have someone in mind like David taking on Goliath,( I Sam.17) or Gideon’s 300 facing 135,000 Midianites(Judg.7). As the price of victory soldiers in a good cause would suffer wounds of which they would be justifiably proud. Athletes determined to be the best in their sport in the hope of an Olympic wreath would have to be single-minded as they trained and competed to the limit. Again their bruises and sore muscles would seem trivial compared to the sweet triumph of success. The farmer of Paul’s day without the modern machinery we take for granted would have to work from dawn to dusk to care for his animals or crops. What were a few blisters and an aching back when his herds were flourishing and his crops bountiful? Thus Paul put suffering in perspective. He looked beyond the pain to the rich reward in changed lives. He could rejoice, not for the suffering, but for the outcome.

We have grown up in recent generations in the developed world with the idea that pain is wrong and avoidable. With the right medical help, gym programme, the latest diet or some government intervention, pain is supposed to be unnecessary. We do not know about strong grace through hard times. And so we have lost interest in teaching ‘faithful men who will be able to teach others also.’

Two weeks ago we had a very sad phone call from Habib Sadiq in Lahore, Pakistan. The previous day a mob of 3000 had attacked a Christian area Nick and I visited 2 years ago. About 400 homes were burned to the ground, 800 families were left homeless, and many died. The only person arrested was the Christian man who was alleged to have said something derogatory about Mohammed. Meanwhile the school in a brickworks, with 60 kids from enslaved families whom we are seeking to support, struggles on. The key to change in Lahore will be in projects like the Bible teaching programme Habib is providing for Christian leaders which can teach them ‘strong grace’.

Jampani’s project in the rice paddies of Andhra Pradesh, South India, to provide schooling for around 90 kids from desperately poor families close to starvation is still developing but the resources to

provide food, books, uniforms, medical care and teachers, always based on Bible teaching, is a hand to mouth exercise. Several recent fund raising projects have helped and we have more in the pipeline.

Our medical mission to remote areas of Fiji last August was immensely worthwhile apart from the dengue fever which took me many months to get over. Aisake Emmanuel wants us to go back again for more missions but he also has another project for us. The village health workers try their very best to provide medical help with limited training and hopelessly inadequate resources. They want us to go over to design an on-going training programme for these workers. We want to help but first we need to look and listen to discover where the gaps are which could be closed. One delightful afternoon a few months ago, a string quartet played in the lounge at the Lodge while afternoon tea was served to raise money for 2 nearly blind Fijian kids. Any more bright ideas?

John Wandera's team in Uganda continue to do a brilliant job of making sure gifts from the sponsors of 300 orphans are wisely and carefully used. There are many thousands more who are just as needy. Our dreams are to provide a medical clinic at John's base which not only treats the sick but trains health workers, and to set up a high quality school for some of the really bright kids which could be an example of what can be done by dedicated teachers. Again Bible training is the key.

Paul made it quite clear to the Philippians in 4:11,12 that not all Christian service was painful. He has also learned to be content with prosperity, being filled and having abundance! There are wonderfully good times when our joy just bubbles over with delight. We are going through such a time as a family at present. Nick is engaged to Tracey, a gorgeous girl we so much love. They are to be married on 11<sup>th</sup> May so we are all somewhat preoccupied with planning the wedding of the century. He completed his Master's degree at the end of last year and was wondering what God had next. The answer was Tracey. Nick has also started work as our medical practice manager. We have plans to expand the practice with another doctor joining us part time and at the same time developing our service to those with ADHD. After four weeks, it is obvious he is going to make a major difference and take much pressure off Chris and me. After two large and greatly enjoyed camps at Taihoa near Opotiki in January, it was clear to all of us that it was time to give up the lease which Nick has had on the farm there, to free him for other things. We have all enjoyed four and a half very fruitful years in which he and those who have helped him have made a lasting difference in the lives of many young people.

Pete is still based in Turangi using all of his spare time to help with the Fire Service and St John's Ambulance. He is still deeply committed to relieving suffering. He will shortly do a course to be able to drive and operate a fire engine, a dream most of us guys have had since infancy! Talking of Turangi, Pete now has new neighbours in town. Sam and Thelma Chapman, who have accomplished remarkable things in South Auckland, have left Otara to be based back in Sam's family setting. The circumstances leading to their move have been tough but they are smiling as usual. After 30 years we will miss them greatly though Sam promises to come up often to lecture.

Bible school continues to flourish, though numbers are small, but there are a steady stream of those determined to learn about 'strong grace', and keen to teach faithful men and women. Do join us!

Our love in Christ,                      Tony, Chris, Nick and Pete