

FOWEY FABLES – NO. 7 - APRIL 2004

Dear Friend

Paul must have been crazy! As he sat down to write I Corinthians he had a huge list of problems in the church at Corinth which he knew he had to address. Every chapter in the book presents a specific area of failure; some chapters describe two failures! It must have been so discouraging to be writing only a year or two after his long visit to Corinth described in Acts 18. How could they have so many problems in so short a time after such good teaching? Surely they were hopeless? Better give up and invest his time and energy somewhere else? Yet Paul started his letter by explaining how he gave thanks to God every time he thought of the Corinthian Christians! (I Cor.1:4)

He even called them saints. How could they be saints when they were divided,(chap.1) conceited,(2) childish,(3) proud,(4) immoral,(5) litigious,(6) had struggling marriages,(7) were idolatrous,(8) critical,(9) grumbling,(10) greedy,(11) competitive,(12) unloving,(13) selfish,(14) doubted the resurrection,(15) and were mean with their money (16)?

Now notice carefully that Paul did not thank God for their behaviour nor did he say they were behaving like saints. He thanked God 'for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus.' He was grateful not for what they did but for what they had. They had all of God's grace because Christ lived in them. They were 'rich' in the right words for every occasion; they were wealthy in understanding for every situation; they were affluent in the spiritual gifts that were needed to keep them going to the end of their lives. (I Cor.1:5-8)

He reminded them they were called to be saints. Sainthood is God's plan for every Christian. The word 'saint' in the New Testament is not describing a super-Christian worthy of his or her own stained glass window in a cathedral. It is simply about ownership, to whom we exclusively belong. My toothbrush has been sanctified. It is mine and I do not wish to share it. That is how God sees those who have been redeemed at the cross of Christ. It takes grace to make sainthood work, for us to be able to behave as the saints we have been called to be. It takes grace to allow us to enjoy fellowship with Christ and each other. (I Cor.1:9) It takes grace to equip us to be the messengers of the gospel we have been appointed to be. (I Cor.1:1)

In the light of the grace of God in which they were rich, there was no problem they faced which could not be overcome. Paul was entitled to be crazily optimistic as he worked through his long catalogue of problems in the church. It did not matter what the problem, Christ's grace in them could change them to make them the saints the problem required, whether in the church, business, marriage or the family.

Far from being discouraged that the 18 months he had spent in Corinth had been wasted Paul simply continued for another 16 chapters to remind them of the practical implications of grace. And it worked! When he wrote II Corinthians only a few months later Paul was overjoyed that the word of God had produced a change of heart and so a change of behaviour. (II Cor.7) He was not crazy in a psychiatric sense though he was happy to be regarded as a fool for Christ's sake. (I Cor.4:10)

Let me tell you about some of the other crazy people we have heard from lately. John Wandera has been back in Uganda for 4 years since his time in Bible School. He is an evangelist with a particular concern for the countless orphans of AIDS and war in his country. A few weeks ago he travelled to the north of Uganda to see what help he could bring to some of his people who had gone through two terrible experiences. First they had been abducted by the guerrillas known as the Lord's Resistance Army to become child soldiers, and then after

escaping to the supposed safety of a refugee camp, 200 had been massacred by the rebels. Over 3000 families are surviving each in paper or polythene huts no more than 3 metres square with minimal food, contaminated water and inadequate sanitation. John passed on what little supplies he had been able to bring to a few families and set out by bus for the return journey over dusty potholed roads. The bus was fired on by guerrillas, the engine disabled and some passengers wounded. Amid flying bullets, John escaped into the surrounding bush and after running for hours reached safety.

Amiel, a student until 2 years ago, is now back in the Philippines working with his father, Nonilo Sanchez, in the southern, predominantly Muslim, island of Mindanao, planting churches and training pastors while in constant danger from rebels.

Thang, a student from 6-7 years ago, is a pastor in Myanmar, a poverty stricken country run by a Buddhist military dictatorship whose policy is to eliminate the Christian church. Buddhist monks take orphan children from Christian families into their temples to indoctrinate them in Buddhism. Thang is working to rescue the kids and care for them in Christian homes. Sounds dangerous!

Babu Jampani went back to India a couple of years ago and is church planting in his area. Four months ago their church and homes were destroyed by a cyclone. Many people are desperate and depressed. Jampani's solution is to continue teaching them the scriptures and the grace of God. Samuel Dasi is a pastor and a pastor's son. He returned from the Lodge 2 years ago to another part of India and is caring for three churches. As the result of drought, people are starving and begging him for just one meal. He shares all he has. Are they both foolish?

In two weeks time Ron Russell, now in his early seventies, sails once more on Dayspring III to Vanuatu. He and an enthusiastic equally crazy crew will be showing the Jesus film on remote islands. They will be away for 6 months on what just may be his last overseas voyage.

And what about the slightly mad people at Fowey Lodge? The first term of Bible School is over. We start again in a week's time. We have more students than we have space for but they are hungry to learn. We have a wonderful team of lecturers, tutors, and practical helpers who must be crazy; they work for nothing. We have just survived another audit by NZQA who have an even longer list than before of irrelevant demands including requiring us to have employment contracts and conduct job appraisals with voluntary helpers. I hope they do not strike for better conditions!

Pete has loved his first term as a third former at St Kentigern College. He is a big hitting cricketer and an impressive wicket keeper. He is also putting his whole heart into study and surprising himself. Nick is in his last year of a BA at Auckland University. His grasp of God's grace is exciting. He has just finished the 4th issue of Incite. He has done a brilliant job. He will be delighted to e-mail or post you a free copy. Chris and I continue to have fun balancing Bible School, medical practice and family. Sometimes we overbalance but God in His grace picks us up.

Our love in Christ,

Tony and Christine