

Fowey Fables – no.8 - September 2004

For many people, joy comes in a bottle, a syringe or a pipe. For others it takes the form of passion, power, or possessions.. For one prisoner in a Roman jail, 2000 years ago, joy had only one source, the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Paul sounded crazy when 15 times in one short letter he talked of joy or rejoicing. He had been in prison for probably 4 years without trial with little prospect of coming out alive and no Human Rights Act to protect him. He had rivals trying to outdo him, (Phil.1) only a couple of friends on hand whom he could really trust, (Phil.2) a past he was not proud of, (Phil.3) squabbling fellow workers who were causing division, and an uncertainty as to which days he would eat because Roman prisons were BYOF – bring your own food! (Phil.4)

He explained that the secret of his joy lay not in his circumstances but in all God had given him in Jesus Christ which he could thankfully draw on in good times and bad. (Phil.4:11,12) This gave him a strength which was unbreakable whatever the pressure. On one particularly hungry day an old friend turned up from Philippi, a place of which he had both good memories and bad. (Acts 16) Epaphroditus did not just visit his cell to wish him well. He arrived with an incredibly generous gift which meant that for the moment instead of poverty he enjoyed abundance. Because he was Paul, almost certainly that abundance overflowed to fellow prisoners and guards. (Phil.1:13)

There had almost certainly been moments when Paul had wondered whether all his old friends had forgotten him. Now he knew they had not. Did his joy go up when Epaphroditus and the gift arrived? Apparently not. Although Paul was immensely grateful for his good friends, he made it clear that his joy depended on Christ not them. His contentment was constant regardless of circumstances. He wanted them to make the same discovery. They would probably face tough times soon. God, not some aid agency, not even Paul, would be their real provider and the source of their joy. (Phil.4:19)

In recent months we have tasted just a little of what Paul meant. We have experienced the worst and the best of circumstances. On the 31st of August we were due to go to the Environment Court to face a legal notice from the Manukau City Council which would have closed the Lodge down. This had arisen as the result of pressure from several new neighbours upset at the number of students attending lectures and parking outside. The Immigration Department were refusing all student visas, saying we were under investigation by the NZQA who in turn were not answering letters or phone calls. The Inland Revenue Department had presented me with a huge imaginary tax bill and were refusing to discuss it. The future of the Bible School was not looking good!

But the whole team of teachers and helpers, and the student group were wonderfully supportive and united in conviction. We had joy. Then in one remarkable week our world changed. The City Council withdrew from the court action as long as we accommodated the morning lectures off site. The NZQA said they were not investigating us. The Immigration Dept. admitted they had been misinformed and

that students who had been refused could go back for their visas. Even the IRD finally met me and acknowledged they were wrong. We received some very generous gifts. Pakuranga Christian Fellowship offered their premises for the morning programme at only nominal cost. It was quite overwhelming. And we still had joy.

From the 4th of October we will have two morning lecture programmes, one at PCF and another at All Nations Church in Dominion Road under the care of Vipul Kharat, principally for those from North and West Auckland. The evening programme will continue at the Lodge for live in students and a limited number from outside. We do not now have to restrict student numbers. The one qualification for entry is still an open heart to God. A number of new lecturers are becoming involved. Our website will play an increasing role as a study resource.

At the end of June, Nick, Eparama and Lim led a team to Fiji to do further building work at Muanicula, the Fowey Lodge property there, to strengthen the relationship with the local village and to reach out with the gospel. As a consequence of the progress made we have been able to rent out the house to provide an income for further development, and to plan a one month training programme for next March to which we hope to be able to welcome both Fijian and international students. This will be the beginning of the realisation of a long time dream.

In July we headed to Mt Ruapehu with 33 young people and 7 adults for another ski camp. We survived, and God blessed. We are now in the process of planning Water Weeks in January which will this year include Dayspring III again as well as our yacht, Spirit. Ron and Aggie Russell return at the beginning of November from a very fruitful voyage to Vanuatu where the Jesus film has been shown on many islands in the last 6 months. They expect to return there in April next year.

Mail, phone and e-mail bring news of past students and old friends from many places. John Wandera wrote last week:

“A week before last week I travelled again to Northern Uganda where I nearly lost my life last time. But this time we travelled safely to and fro. The situation is still tense including security and soldiers everywhere. I went to meet up with the Government District Officials to launch the programs there. We had bought some blankets and mattresses which were sponsored by somebody from Open Home Foundation. We were welcomed into the District by the Mayor and other Officers. We gave out 25 mattresses, 25 blankets plus scholastic materials to the displaced children by the rebel activities. The children helped were over joyed. They sang and jumped around for joy. There is another need getting a house for them to stay and move them from the overcrowded camps. I am trying to open a door for us to reach them with the gospel. Please keep praying for Lira (Northern Uganda); they really need care and support due to what they are going through.

Last week I again led our Reach out Team for church planting outreach deep towards the shores of Lake Victoria. Since most of the people living there are fishermen, they live luxurious immoral lives marrying more than three women. There is also witchcraftism practised. But thank God for your prayers we experienced the hand of God delivering and saving people from the bondage they were in. Many people came to Christ as we witnessed through door to door, open air crusade and film showing. As a result, two witch doctors also gave their lives to Christ confessing publicly to

people and telling them never to go to them for anything concerning witchcraftism. This brought a big shock and amazement to the whole village at the power of Christ.

The new church begun yesterday Sunday with a big turn up in a small temporary shelter we had put up. It's amazing how people are hungry for the gospel. We are committed to moving on regardless of what to preach Christ. Keep praying for us."

Jampani from India whose region has recently been devastated by a cyclone wrote –
"We are happy to inform you that we are going to celebrate 3rd anniversary on 21st of this month. On this occasion we are going to baptize 6 new believers. At beginning we planned to baptize 20 believers, but the remaining believers are not ready to baptize because of their personal problems. We are praying to God for the remaining 14 believers to make them ready and strengthen spiritually to baptize. We need your precious and special prayers for the baptizing ceremony. Joyfully in Christ."

Nonilo Sanchez from the Philippines wrote –
"I have never felt so weak all my life. Last night Fely and I went for a walk, maybe 400 meter away from home to visit her sick sister. Walking back home, just few meters, I was sweating cold gasping for breath again. Am scared to make another step. Suddenly what was only 10-12 steps to a bench became seemingly far and hard to reach. Since Fely can't carry me, I told her to leave me alone and get a taxi. Is this a forced rest?" He is now out of hospital and back running mobile Bible schools.

Thang from Myanmar shared more of his progress to establish a refuge for orphan children who would otherwise be compelled to enter Buddhist monasteries. He recently wrote –
"As we are approaching to winter, the villagers are preparing to build a school building. Your gifts will be used for this building. I believe you will also be happy about it. It is my joy to help the needy people. I also believe that it is precious and worthy before God. Life is meaningful when we help those who are poor in spirit and body."

Samuel Dasi, back pastoring a church in India in an area recently badly affected by drought and famine, got married this week.

Minyeo Oh describes her work with the underground church in Bhutan.

Samuel Naligala is also in Bhutan as part of a United Nations education programme.

Alfred Nsofwa in Zambia combines church planting, teaching a Bible school and caring for children orphaned by AIDS.

Silas Murthi back in Fiji has struggled to find a job. He has a fiancée who is very seriously ill. He helped Nick with the work at Muanicula.

Dan Ritz from Canada was a student here nearly 20 years ago. He is happily married with 3 kids. He writes that what he learned at the Lodge still makes sense.

Dennis and Michelle Schultz from Oregon, USA are deeply involved in a ministry with other couples. Michelle first came as a student in the 70s. God continues to bless them richly.

Adrian and Debbie Wong are here from Brazil, visiting family before preparing to move to Malaysia for missionary work.

Anne and Rudy with young Jasper are back in Beijing in a very different world from the one they have become used to and in which they met the Lord. They know God is keeping them.

Thierry Tabailou who lives at the Lodge with his wife Jenny and 4 kids is visiting his family in France for the first time in 12 years, and the first time as a believer. His mother will not let him out of her sight!

All of them know the joy of Christ in hunger and in plenty.

Nick is in the last few weeks of his BA at Auckland University with exciting ideas about the future. Pete has had a good first year at St Kentigern College and cannot wait for the new cricket season to begin. Christine and I had a wonderful week recently in Cairns, Northern Queensland, the result of a marvellous gift marked 'for a holiday only'! Our medical practice continues to be a happy team with our big 'family' of patients who seem to appreciate what we seek to offer them.

We pray that you will continue to know the overflowing joy of Christ because of His grace, whatever your situation. We would love you to share it with us.

Our love in Christ,

Tony and Christine

