

Fowey Fables – No.20

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It might have been Job, (it wasn't!) who first coined the expression, 'with friends like you, who needs enemies?' The story of his well meaning, so-called comforters whose bad advice to someone already suffering almost beyond belief is infamous. He had suffered the loss of his 10 children, his huge farm and his health, all the work of Satan. Even his wife had turned against him. His friends told him God had done all this to punish him for sin and that he needed to confess it. The best part of their visit was the first seven days when they were so overcome by the horror of Job's situation that they could not utter a word.(2:11-13) Then unfortunately they opened their mouths, as we think we have to when others are struggling, and Job's suffering multiplied. It is all too easy to criticize their misplaced attempts to explain why Job was suffering which are all too similar to some of our clumsy efforts when friends are hurting. But what should they have said?

Eight times the three friends spoke to Job and eight times he replied, sinking deeper into despair as each new blow was struck and his frustration grew. On the first four occasions after answering their bad advice, he then spoke to God. In the last four responses Job even gave up on prayer. All this time God said not a word. Why not?

When we follow Job's answers one by one we find Job making discoveries about his relationship with God which slowly added together into a thorough grasp of the Christian gospel.(7:21; 9:32,33; 14:14; 16:19; 17:3; 19:25; 21:22; 23:10-12) Had God really been silent? The Holy Spirit, the Teacher, had been speaking into the deeply wounded but still teachable heart of Job, as He does with us even when we think He is silent.

When God finally spoke aloud in chapter 38, He said nothing of why suffering had come to Job or even of the role of Satan. Instead of telling 'why?', He opened Job's understanding of His work as the Creator and started to answer the much more important question, 'what now?'. What should his friends have said? Nothing - until Job was ready and God gave them something to say. God gave us two ears and only one mouth to be used in that proportion! One ear to listen to God and one to those we seek to counsel or teach. Then and only then we should open our mouths.

We continue to be so thankful to God for those many good friends who listen to Him, and then us, and only open their mouths and their hearts when God gives them words and deeds of wisdom and encouragement. In recent months we have had some great visits from old friends like Mike Wells of Abiding Life and Stephen Lungu from African Enterprise. Dick Park is back lecturing again and being thoroughly enjoyed. More than anything this time I want to tell you about what my amazing family have been up to.

In July Christine had the opportunity with her cousin, Catherine, to visit the children in Uganda whose sponsorship she has been very faithfully organizing in conjunction with John Wandera for the past 8 years. She describes the experience:

“My trip to Uganda in July this year was an experience of a lifetime. Every day was incredibly meaningful and I would fall into bed at night exhausted and often depressed.

How do I paint a picture in words of an experience that repeatedly felt like my heart was being ripped out but has now left me so in love with new friends that I am still there in spirit?

The first day in a village called Banambyte left me shocked and angry! What does one do with anger that has no tangible target? I guess this is why I came to the end of each day so depressed.

Because I know the theory of forgiveness my prayer each night was something like, ‘God, I hate what I am seeing. I want to leave and not have to face this reality. I can’t do anything here that will make a difference. The scale is too large.’

But then I would wake each new day and say something like,

‘Thank you, Jesus, for what I need today – Your wisdom first, Your forgiveness, Your love, Your mercy, Your grace, Your peace, and all the other promises You have made in Your Word.’

Praying this prayer meant everything and I found a compulsion to continue with energy and discernment...”

If you would like the full account of her journey just e-mail her on jahanne@clear.net.nz

Nick and Pete have made remarkable progress in their huge adventure in setting up their property in Opotiki for a youth programme. Nick writes:

“Opotiki update

The last four months have been eventful to say the least. Our car was broken into, our house was broken into, Pete rescued a truck driver from a lorry hanging precariously over the Waioeka river (making national news in the process), a local trust was formed for a youth outdoor programme, the old cabin has been partially renovated, a youth group established in conjunction with Christians from all kinds of local churches, opportunity to work every week on a mural in town with challenging kids from a small local school and occasionally when there is time we get in a spot of pig hunting. If anyone asks me if I’m finding life in the country too quiet, I suggest they come and visit us in Opotiki! We’ve greatly appreciated the help from so many in Auckland who’ve made it down at some point for weekends working on the farm and for the wonderful gifts that have been made, and a special thank you to Kristen Hunsburger from Vancouver for six weeks of friendship and hard work.. We’ve become the proud owners of four young bulls – whom I’ve resisted individually naming in the knowledge that they’ll be heading off on a cattle truck never to return. All in all, the Lord has been wonderfully faithful and given us hope and enthusiasm despite the challenges. We plan to hold Water Weeks down there this summer from the 4th of January onwards, so let us know if you have anyone who would like to come on the camps.” You can reach Nick on nickjhanne1982@hotmail.com.

As for Pete, this article in the New Zealand Herald of a few weeks ago tells it all:

‘A truckie wants a bravery award for the teenager who pulled him from his vehicle as it threatened to plunge into a river... Paul Clarke was driving north from Gisborne when his 23-tonne truck slid off the road in a windy gorge near Opotiki. It was late at night, and the 45 year old was trapped in the cab as it hung a metre above the waters of the Waioeka River. The weight of the truck’s trailer was threatening to propel the vehicle into the river. Then 18 year old Peter Hanne arrived from his home nearby. He climbed on to the shifting truck, smashed the cab’s back window with a wheel brace and hauled Mr Clarke to safety... “He had the confidence of an experienced rescuer, giving no thought for his own life to rescue me. If my truck had gone, he would have gone with me.”... The 18 year old dismissed any notion that his actions were heroic, saying, “Nah, that’s not true. It was just right place, right time.”’

Back at the Lodge, life is tame by comparison. We have had a great year of Bible School with a lovely group of students who really want to learn. The dorms are fully occupied for the first time for several years with some delightful people including Samuel and Cushla Lula from years ago who are back with their five kids. The tennis court is finally finished about 12 years after we set out to restore it. The shower in the main house which was irreparable 5 years ago is now working again thanks to some Fijian ingenuity. I am just leaving for our fourth and final seminar on Christian leadership in Suva where Nick and Peter Williams have been quietly working behind the scenes this past week. While I am there I will be meeting with Christian doctors to encourage their massive task of providing adequate health care with very meagre resources.

At times we feel like Job with seemingly overwhelming challenges but quietly God keeps blessing us beyond our dreams! Every day we ask, ‘Lord, what now?’

Please share your challenges and dreams with us

Our love in Christ
Tony, Christine, Nick and Pete