

Of all the cities Paul visited on his travels the one I would most like to have experienced with him has always been Ephesus. It was probably the hardest of many hard places in which he spent time because the whole culture and economy of the city was about idolatry, the worship of Artemis – Mrs God! Despite the enormous challenge of establishing the Christian message there, when Paul came to write his various pastoral letters, Ephesus seemed to be the only church without a problem which needed answering. How can that have been? What was Paul's strategy which had been so fruitful? After the Jewish synagogue rejected him he started a Bible school which ran for two years in rented premises (Acts 19:9,10). Not only did it produce a revolution in Ephesus but the whole of Asia Minor heard the good news. How could that happen without TV, smart phones or even a PA system or printing? The Ephesian students, who became excited about what Paul taught them, spread out to distant places and others from towns like Colossae (Col.1:7; 4:12) were drawn to the big city and returned afterwards to their own people, changed forever, and longing to share Whom they had found in Bible school.

When Paul came to write his letter to the Ephesians, he described a seemingly impossible contrast. They were tolerant, humble, gentle, patient, loving, united and peaceful (Eph.4:1-3). At the same time, they had a rock-solid certainty about the Truth, not one truth among many, but the only Truth (Eph.4-6). Some people are endlessly tolerant because they are certain about nothing. Others adhere rigidly to their doctrine and look out if we dare oppose them. How can love and truth go together? Paul goes on to explain – because grace was given in the gift of Christ (Eph.4:7-10). At an earlier time, Jesus' neighbours had been blown away by the seemingly impossible mix in Him of grace and authority (Luke 4:22,32). They were so perturbed by the contradiction that they were prepared to throw Him over a cliff.

Paul then went on to explain to the Ephesians how they could make love and truth work – by teaching the Bible in such a way that spiritual babies would grow up to become spiritual men and women who could live and tell the truth in love (Eph.4:11-15). His vision for Ephesus was that the entire church would be a mature team of teachers who would function like the different members of a body under the direction of the Head. The fellowship would have no useless limbs lounging around.

We are much more used to a model of the church which is more like a pre-school presided over by one or more kindergarten teachers dishing out biscuits and soft drinks between changing nappies, preventing escapes and stopping fights. But can the Ephesian kind of church work today?

Our Bible conference in October was an intriguing day on the topic of 'the Good News for the Facebook Generation'. We had seven very different perspectives that Nick is putting together into a magazine which we want to circulate to widen discussion. The common conviction was that the message of God's love in Christ remains as powerful and relevant as ever but we may need to drop some of the religious/cultural trimmings so that young people can hear it. It is looking likely that our next conference in April will ask the question 'What does the Bible really say about heaven and hell?' More details soon.

We have recently had a powerful series of evenings with Dr Steve Kumar, an old friend from way back. He explored with us how Christian truth has been attacked from so many angles in the last few decades and how we could be much more effective defenders of the faith if we took time to understand what nonsense these philosophies are and how beautifully Christianity stands up when compared with anything else. We are hoping to have him back again this year.

It is an enormous delight in running a Bible school to hear how a former student is now a Bible teacher. Some of you may remember Hoon Ha from South Korea who came to Fowey Lodge with his sister and brother-in-law. We have just heard from him for the first time for 15 years that he is now a pastor in his own country.

Here at the Lodge we are excited that Jason Samuels, Ruth Pologa's brother, who has been a student for over a year, is taking a lead in our youth programme. During January he shared with us in leading our two youth camps which this year were up at Mangawhai Heads. Planning was very much last minute because we had only just been offered some great facilities. The Lord brought together an enthusiastic team for what will be a new era in our camp programme. We are hoping for another camp in May. Saying good bye to Taihoa near Opotiki was sad after 4 great years but we knew God would have something new for us.

We have often written about Jampani who was a student at the Lodge nearly 20 years ago. Nick and I have twice visited his school in the remote rice paddies of South India and admired his passion for teaching desperately needy children. Sponsorship for the children in his courageous programme has become a project we have often told you about. Month by month we are seeing interest grow among those who want to help. He has just shared a thrilling new opportunity to take over the leadership of an established Bible school in the same area. Our conviction about each child sponsorship programme in which we have been involved has been that while it is great to provide education, medical care and a family home, in the end little changes unless there is a strong foundation of Bible teaching so that love and truth miraculously combine.

Nick and Tracey are now very happily settled as a married couple. Baby Eva, our first grandchild, arrived on 22nd October. She is beautiful – which is what all biased grandparents say – but obviously already a delightful character. For us being grandparents is a whole new wonderful experience with which we will continue to bore you in future Fowey Fables. Eva has amazing parents who are tenderly looking after each other and her. We have every confidence that she will trust Jesus and grow into a woman of God who will make a difference in a new generation.

Nick's role as manager of both our medical practice and Fowey Lodge is growing as fast as Eva. He is leading all kinds of major developments which will bear fruit over the next several years. More than anything he is maturing as a teacher of grace.

Pete is still married to the Fire Service in Turangi where he is greatly respected as a young man of integrity who cares. He recently for the first time was in charge when his team went into a burning house. His quiet faith shows. We have great expectations for him.

Our love in Christ,

Tony and Christine