



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

200 Years of the Gospel in NZ

John 4:5-42

23rd March, 2014

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... it being Christmas Day, I preached from the second chapter of St Luke's Gospel, the tenth verse: "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy."

So wrote Samuel Marsden about the first ever preaching of the gospel in New Zealand on Christmas Day 1814. After preaching that first message he wrote:

In this manner the Gospel has been introduced to New Zealand; and I fervently pray that the glory of it may never depart from its inhabitants, till time shall be no more!

If the people who received it in that generation had received it with joy but never talked about it, today all of us would be in ignorance. Everyone has to hear from someone, so now as we go about our daily lives, it is our turn to pass on the good news. Some of us may feel quite ill-equipped. Let's think a bit about how Jesus did it.

Today we heard about his approach to a woman with whom he fell into conversation. He was sitting down and waiting for lunch to come. Have you ever wondered why he didn't go into town with the disciples to get something to eat? It was most unusual for anyone to come to the well in the middle of the day. But his heavenly Father had a plan and work for Jesus to do here at the well. We know that, from v34 where Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." How did he know God's will about this event? I suggest that he operated much as we can – listening to God as we go along during the day and getting nudges in the right direction.

God's plan was to reach this Samaritan village through a woman who was a social pariah, a social outcast. So Jesus waited in obedience to the prompting of God and this woman turned up most unexpectedly! So he started a conversation about a drink of water.

He could have said to himself, "I'm hot, dusty and tired. I've been walking all morning, talking and doing discipleship training along the way, now I want a bit of down-time." But no, he chose to engage with the woman and to share the good news with her. She was not a push-over by any means. She had an answer for every comment he gave, but she did show an interest in spiritual matters, talking about worship and about the Messiah. So he kept talking to her and he listened to God as he did so.

Listening to God and talking to the woman at the same time! That is a skill to be learned and takes practice. As Jesus listened, his Father showed him that the woman had had five husbands and the man she was currently with, was not her husband. A pretty startling track record, even for our time!

God can give us ways into people's lives that will arrest their attention. This special kind of knowing about a person's life is not limited to the first century nor is it limited to Jesus. As I was talking to a man some time ago, I had an impression of a band around his head. There was nothing there I could see with my eyes, it was a kind of knowing. When I mentioned that, it turned out that he had been deeply involved with martial arts and had worn a headband as part of his uniform. This knowledge that God had given me was a significant turning point in the conversation.

God can give us that useful knowledge in a number of different ways to help us as we try to make our conversations count for the kingdom. It is perfectly normal and right for him to help us where our own knowledge and abilities are not enough. Sometimes what God gives us can cut through a smokescreen or someone's defensiveness so we get to talk about what really matters.

Our primary marching orders are in Matthew 28, Jesus' last words to his disciples before ascending to heaven: "Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Another set of instructions are in Luke 10, where Jesus sends out the seventy-two disciples, saying "Heal the sick and preach the good news of the Kingdom of God."

This is what we can expect when we are disciples of Jesus. But he does not hand out the instructions and then leave us on our own. He knows we need to be shown what to do. While he was in the flesh, he took his disciples around with him and showed them what to do before he sent them out on their own.

The first step is to decide that we want to follow Jesus, then we need to get equipped to do what he wants us to do. Two opportunities in front of us as a congregation right now are:

1. The healing prayer training here at church on the next three Saturday afternoons, and
2. The instruction we are able to receive from Dave Mann, leader of the Hope Project, across at the Baptist church hall at 9 o'clock next Saturday morning.

Dave will be introducing us to a way of making use of everyday situations to open up fruitful conversations. He will show us how to use questions to open things up.

These are two opportunities to get equipped. After that, we need to actually go out and do it. I have noticed in New Zealand that we tend to attend lots of seminars and conferences, but we hesitate to actually do the stuff. We love to hear new teaching but we are slow to step out and use it on the street and in the market place, wherever we find ourselves in our daily lives.

One amazing opportunity coming up is this Easter. Graham Braddock, a local artist, will be making a large chalk drawing of his best-known painting on the footpath in Silverdale. There will be many people coming and watching as he does this over three days. It will be an ideal opportunity to talk to people who stop to look and are interested in what he is drawing. I am so keen to go. Do come; it will be fun to do it together with friends, watching the picture take shape and talking to passers-by.

When we step out in obedience to God's prompting, he will support us as we walk in obedience to him.

I am reminded of Exodus 17 where the people said, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

When we talk to anyone, how will they know he is with us? How will they know that we are not just nice people? It's by what happens as a result of our being bearers of the Holy Spirit. God has given us His spirit.

^{NKJV} 2 Timothy 1:7 *For God has not given us a spirit of **fear**, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

The fear that I have experienced in the context of talking to people about spiritual matters, is mostly fear of rejection. For me, this fear of rejection has gradually got less over the years. Getting over it has been partly to do with starting to realize that I have something good to offer that they know nothing about. Also, I started to realize that their need to know about Jesus is more important than my need to feel comfortable.

Fear of rejection and fear of being thought a fool are fed by the media which often puts Christians down. We can say to ourselves, "The negative propaganda about Christians put over the media is not true and I can ignore it." Are we more influenced by TV, magazines, newspapers and movies than by God's word? It's time to change that. We can also pray that God will give us courage and boldness in order to obey him. That's a

prayer I bet he will answer positively! We CAN turn from fear and expect God to fulfill his word, equipping us to move in works of power.

*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of **power** and of love and of a sound mind.*

Late last year, Ian and I were walking out of the supermarket and a woman was close by me on the left. She was limping badly. I said to her, "You look as if you are in pain." When she agreed that was the case, I offered to pray for her painful leg. After we prayed, it was suddenly much better – she said the pain had reduced by 70%. I could have just murmured sympathy to her, but I took a step of faith and offered to pray for her. Is the Lord among us or not? Yes, he is!

Another example is praying for bad situations to change and it happening. At *mainly music* recently, one mother talked about having very poor sleep, due to her two-year-old waking up every night with night terrors, screaming inconsolably. As a team, we prayed for the child and the night terrors ceased.

^{NKJV} 2 Timothy 1:7 *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of **love** and of a sound mind.*

God sends his Spirit to fill us with love, so that we are willing to reach out to others, not just do things that benefit ourselves or our own family. A group of St Stephen's women met together a few days ago to cook meals for people in need. I understand that Everyman, our men's group, is planning to work together on projects that make a difference.

^{NKJV} 2 Timothy 1:7 *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of **a sound mind**.*

His Spirit also gives us a sound mind; wisdom that is different from the world's wisdom. This is described in James 3:17:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (NKJV)

Power, love and a sound mind – taste and see that the Lord is with us. Taste and see that He **is** good.

Many of the Samaritans believed in Jesus because of what the woman said – "He told me everything I ever did." As we trust the Lord to give us wisdom, knowledge and confidence in our conversations, we can expect to see people come to faith in Jesus. I encourage you to attend the Hope Project at the Baptist Church on Saturday morning, to learn how to turn everyday situations into Kingdom opportunities.

They are opportunities to start fruitful conversations about spiritual matters. They don't have to all end in a signed deal, with the person fully convinced. Remember the Samaritan woman who ran back to town and said "This man told me everything I ever did. Could he be the Messiah?" She was well on the way but she had not come to full conviction yet.

Last week, Ian preached about the time when Jesus was transfigured in front of Peter, James and John. An awesome sight, but the point is not just "Wow, isn't Jesus amazing?" but to pay attention to what God said – "This is my Son, listen to him!" Listen, attend, act! He is not so unfair as to give us commands which we cannot obey.

Matthew 28:18-20 ¹⁸ *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ "teaching them to observe(to obey) all things that I have commanded you; and lo,(realize this important truth) I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

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