



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
3 Stanmore Bay Road,
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.
www.ststephenswgp.org.nz

Sermon

The Importance of Evangelism

1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Kings 5:1-14

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Compassion and Trust

The girl was an evangelist! What girl? The slave girl in the account of Naaman. She knew something which would help her master and she told him about it. What a courageous child! There she was a slave – liable to punishment even death at her master's whim yet she urges her master to seek healing from the prophet in Israel. A compassionate heart even for the one who enslaved her.

What if the divisions of war meant Naaman were turned away? Why should she think Elisha would be able to cleanse him? And if he were not healed - what wrath would be visited upon her then? But she trusted which is a major part of faith. A compassionate and faithful girl indeed!

Now the Aramites have been at war with Israel. But General Naaman goes to Israel and he asks for healing. Elisha tells the king to send Naaman to him. When the general and his attendants arrive at the prophet's door, he doesn't even come out but simply passes word that Naaman should wash seven times in the Jordan. Eventually he obeys, is cleansed and his skin is restored like that of a young boy.

Faith Actions

Naaman had protested that the Jordan River was nothing much – not worth washing in. But that was not the point – it was an act of obedience and faith. I remember a church camp up the Kauranga Valley. We were praying in small groups for people's needs. I looked across and saw some people praying for an older woman's eyes. As I watched, I realised they were praying 'safe' prayers. You know, the sort that don't commit you. No one would know if they were not answered. No blame could be attached to the pray-er if nothing happened. I knew they had to go out on a limb – commit themselves – pray dangerously. So I explained it to them and asked the lady what she wanted. She was suffering from strong pain in her eyes and said that she just wanted the pain to go, she didn't care about the sight. We asked God for direction. Someone remembered Jesus spitting on the ground, making mud and wiping it on a blind man's eyes. "O dear!" I thought, "this is getting dangerous!" We were waiting awkwardly wondering what to do, when the lady announced that she knew she had to stand outside in the rain and let the rainwater wash her eyes.

I should say it was bucketing down. So we dressed her up in a number of raincoats and she went outside and looked straight up at the sky for a while. Then she came back under the veranda. When I asked her, how her eyes were, she said, "the pain's gone of course," and looked most surprised at my question.

She had trusted her impression – there it is - trusting faith. I don't think the actions of Naaman washing in the Jordon or that lady letting the rain fall into her eyes, were in themselves healing. But they were actions obeying God and he used them to make some faith-healing connection with them.

Naaman was of course healed. In the following verses we learn that he was also converted: He said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. ... Your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD."¹

These were people trusted God and acted: the girl, Naaman, his king, Elisha, the servants who persuade Naaman to try the washing, and Naaman again as he did it. In the end, the little evangelist had been successful in bringing healing of both body and spirit. She had told a needy person the good news.

Our Epistle reading continues on immediately from last week's. Remember, Paul was saying that he made himself all things to all men so that by all possible means he might save some.² He endeavoured to get past cultural barriers to reach people. For the Jew, he would act as a Jew. For the non-Jew, he would be as a non-Jew. How important was it to Paul to reach people with the good news of Christ? He wrote, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"³ The New Living Translation says, "How terrible for me if I do not preach the gospel."

We must tell others about Jesus and his salvation. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."⁴ The whole thrust of the Bible is that there is a problem – we are separated from God by our sins. We try and fail to bridge that gap. There is only one solution to the problem and that is Jesus.

But it is not enough that the solution exists, we need to ask for his salvation and trust that his death for us is enough.

So many people don't understand. So many reject Christianity thinking it is just about being a good person. They have no idea. They may think they can never be good enough. They may think it is empty of promise because they have never seen the real thing. Whatever the reason, they don't know and it is our responsibility to tell people.

Have you ever surrendered to Christ? If so, who told you about him? Who broke the taboo of speaking about spiritual things to you? Are you grateful for that person?

The risk involved in NZ, is not as great as it was for that slave girl who told her master, Naaman. She could have been beaten or even killed. We only risk embarrassment.

In the Hope Project, we were given initial assistance to break the ice. Did you make use of the teaching, the practice sessions in home groups, the opportunities when the booklet and TV advertisements were current? Did you send a Hope booklet to a friend with your Christmas card? I know some of you did.

There will be more such opportunities. As they come, let's push our personal boundaries further out and try things we have not done before.

We want the Op Shop to be a means of outreach. I am told that already some have been prayed for there. As you know, we have now established a seating area when people can rest, have a chat, maybe be given a cuppa, maybe receive prayer for their needs. We hope that will grow and people will find comfort, spiritual help, healing and maybe salvation there. That is the start of an outreach. It may be that you could bring a friend to the Op Shop for prayer, who would not feel able to come to church.

¹ 2 Kings 5:15b,17b

² 1 Cor 9:22

³ 1 Cor 9:16b

⁴ Acts

Last week, Vestry approved our involvement with Job Club a new initiative to reach out to the unemployed. It provides a support group, training and encouragement as they apply for jobs. At the time, they have the opportunity to learn about the gospel. Tony is keen to train for the task and develop the project. He says it is a role made for him – praise God.

Last year, a number of us started to break out of our safety zone and twice went out on the streets offering to pray for people. If you are not praying for people within the church you will not do it out there. So some need to get started in here. Others of us need to pluck up courage to move outside these walls.

Helen and our guests Jack and Pat went on another local outreach recently. It is called “Chocopinion.” A group takes a market stall and conducts a survey with a chocolate bar reward. The survey identifies those who are interested in spiritual matters. For those who are, there may be a presentation of the gospel. They came back excited and pleased with the opportunities they got. Helen is going again – perhaps you’d like to put your toe in the water with her?

How important is it? Yesterday, Emmy Wilson, who does much prison ministry, told us that she has heard several prisoners tell of Near-Death Experiences in which they saw hell. Most of the NDE accounts we hear are of lovely dreamy light-filled places. I remember Jennifer Rees Larcombe saying she was interviewed by a pair of researchers into NDE. She commented to them that it is odd that all NDE are positive. They said that they are not, but they were not allowed to tell of the negative ones. Anyway, Emmy recounted that several men had told her of seeing frightening scenes of hell.

It is not a popular topic. People want to say God is love and so could not have such a thing. If that is your idea, let me ask you. Do you think Jesus was loving? Do you realise that he spoke more of hell than anyone else in the scripture. He was warning of something he believed to be important and dangerous. If there is no judgment he paid a terrible price to save us for nothing. But if there is a judgement, we cannot ignore it. There is something to be saved from.

How important was it to Paul to tell people the way of rescue? He tells us in this passage. He uses all means possible to reach as many as possible with the good news. He disciplined himself to the task. Paul uses an analogy of Isthmus Games which were held near Corinth. He gives examples from athletics. An runner in competition runs with a purpose - to win. If you are running in the 200m race you stay in lane. Don’t drift out of lane because if you do, you run further or are disqualified. If you are running a long distance race you take the shortest route, you don’t go around in figures of eight. If you are boxing you make sure your blows count – it is a fight not mere exercise. So Paul says that he runs to win; he fights to win. He was determined to do the task properly, to give of his best.

Paul was an Apostle and an Evangelist. He was committed and whole-hearted. We may not be either, but we are all to be witnesses of Jesus. We are still to tell others about him. Let’s be committed to the task of telling others; let’s be whole-hearted.

Remember the slave girl, who told her master about a spiritual solution to his problem. She took a great risk. I am going to ask God for an opportunity to tell someone about what Jesus has done for them – will you do the same? I’d love to hear how it went when you have done so.

If you say to me, you don’t know what to say – then you need to learn what to say. Dave Mann’s material is very helpful and practical. We can go through it again. His book is available in the church library. Let’s get equipped, get confident and get talking.