



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

The Disciplined Life

1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Mark 1:40-45

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The Joyful Leper

Leprosy is and was a feared disease. Where modern medicine is available the disease can be halted. Traditionally, the only control was quarantine to try to prevent the spread of the disease from those who carried it.

Such quarantine was devastating as the victim had to leave all normal society, family and work and live alone or in a leper colony. There they would essentially be dependent of charity for their survival and from many communities that would not be provided.

If untreated the disease can cause permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs, and eyes. Nerve damage results in a loss of feeling so that the victim does not protect the extremities from damage, so wounds are repeatedly damaged, ulcerate and rot causing loss of fingers and toes etc.

In first century culture, the disease and any similar-looking skin problem was a terrifying prospect. All normal life was finished, only exclusion, poverty and progressive wasting lay ahead.

One can imagine the fear then of the people and the disciples when a leper approached Jesus. There would be deep-seated fear. There would be concern less the disease somehow passed to them. On top of that there was also the ritual impurity associated.

Somehow, this man with leprosy gained the idea that Jesus could if he were willing, cleanse him from leprosy. Note I said 'cleanse'. That is the literal word. One was healed from most diseases but cleansed from leprosy. It did carry an association with sin and so the sufferer needed cleansing. The common view was that only God could cleanse from leprosy. So this leper's request is even more startling. He dares to approach, he dares to believe that Jesus is powerful enough – certainly at the level of Elisha – to cleanse a leper. He dares to believe it is within Jesus' power to accomplish this and risks so much to approach him and ask.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7oJ3SDmVTA>

Oh the joy of the miracle. How well the film conveys it. The leper is unclean. To touch him not only risked infection but would immediately make the other person unclean as well. Yet when Jesus

touched him, the leper is cleansed because Jesus is more powerful than disease. He is the one who cleanses all.

Jesus instructed the man not to tell people but to go and show the priest his skin so he could be ruled 'clean.' This would be a testimony to the priests. In the Law of Moses they had the provision to test for a cleansing from leprosy but they had never seen it before. However, the man is so overjoyed that he tells everyone and creates such a stir that Jesus can no longer minister in towns but had to stay out in the open countryside.

He was not disciplined. The command to keep quiet was for that particular time – not for all time. It does not apply now – on the contrary we are to tell people about Jesus. We are to tell of his wonderful deeds in our lives.

How would you respond to such an event? How do you respond to the wonder of the salvation you have experienced? You want to tell other people. If we do tell people about Jesus, they too will come to him from everywhere.

The Adaptable Messenger

As we turn to the Epistle, we find Paul in the midst of defending his apostolic ministry against accusations from some of the Corinthians that he wasn't a true apostle because he didn't charge for his preaching! Having justified that he could legitimately charge and why he chose not to, he wrote in verse 16, which was the set reading for last week:

¹⁶ ... preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News! (New Living Translation).

He continued writing of his determination to use all possible means to convey the good news of salvation to as many people as possible. Is that your motivation? Do you want others to know? Do you know something which would benefit others? If it is a matter of life and death; if it is a matter of eternal significance shouldn't we like Paul endeavour to find all ways we can to tell people?

He continued in the passage saying that he adapted himself to those he was trying to reach. If he was with Jews, he lived like a Jew; if he was with Gentiles, he was able to live apart from the Mosaic Law although not the Law of Christ; if he was with the weak in faith he would share their weakness because he wanted to bring them to Christ.

Paul continued in verse 22,

Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

Paul was presenting the gospel in ways which suited the cultures he encountered. We call it contextualisation now. The essence remains the same, but unnecessary barriers are removed. At New Wine, I was talking to a seven year old boy who told me about his Kidszone session and how they had heard about a missionary who went to China and chose to dress like a Chinaman so he could better reach the Chinese people. That was, of course, Hudson Taylor who arrived in China in 1855. Taylor realised that wherever he went he was being referred to as a "black devil" because of the overcoat he wore. He made a decision to adopt native Chinese clothes and pigtail with a shaven forehead, and was then able to gain an audience without creating a disturbance. Hudson Taylor, following Paul's lead, tried to become as a Chinese man to the Chinese so his appearance would not hinder his message.

Incidentally, the same little boy said that they had listened to God and he had heard a call to be a missionary too! I would watch that boy, he may turn out to be just that.

How might you tell others the good news in New Zealand, in Auckland, in Whangaparaoa? We have talked about learning to ask questions when talking to unbelievers to stimulate their thinking and enquiry.

The Hope Project

We have in recent years supported the Hope Project as it has delivered gospel booklets to every letterbox in the country. It started with the bicentenary of the gospel first being preached in NZ by Samuel Marsden. Two more booklets followed presenting the gospel gently in a New Zealand context.

The Hope Project has prepared another booklet to go out at Easter. You may not be a street evangelist (I don't think any of us are) but you can help get these booklets into letterboxes so people can think about the good news this Easter.

Let's hear, Dave Mann the head of the Hope Project as he tells us about this newest outreach.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYsZsxGIMBE&pbjreload=10>

The vision of a restored voice in the public square at times like Christmas and Easter will be easily accomplished if enough Christians believe it is needed.

The Hope Project is one of our Supported Missions and the focus for this February. Vestry will be giving a starter donation of \$250 but we can do much more than that.

You can donate if you wish send directly to the Hope Project as he indicated, or you can give via church here and we will pass it onto them. The flyer in your kitsheet tells you how to do it.

The Disciplined Messenger

Let's turn our attention back to Paul in the Epistle reading. Continuing directly on from last week's reading, in this week's excerpt, Paul speaks of the self-discipline he imposes on himself.

He likens it to the training and competing of an athlete. That was a relevant example for the Corinthians. Every two years they hosted the Isthmian Games – a local version of the Olympics.

Remember last week, we saw a clip from *Chariots of Fire*. Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams had to undergo years of training to prepare for the 1924 Paris Olympic races which only lasted a matter of seconds. That is great discipline.

Verse 25: Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever.

Paul says he does not run aimlessly – he is disciplined and purposeful. He imposes discipline on himself to direct his efforts towards the good purposes of his calling.

²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.

²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave..."

In the film, Eric Liddell spoke in similar terms of running the straight race.

(Video) <https://youtu.be/kgR-pOIFbE>

Have you thought about your life in those terms? It is quite a challenge. You may have been strongly disciplined for a time perhaps through your schooling and university days when striving for success. Maybe in your work or service to others. Do you have a purpose which directs you now? Is there something which makes discipline worthwhile? Which gives you an aim?

May I suggest the gospel has that challenge for all of us? You don't have to be ordained to be committed to the gospel. If Jesus Christ has met you and claimed you for his own; if he has saved you and redeemed you; if he has enrolled you in his kingdom project – then you have a purpose, a calling and a reason to focus your life with discipline.

Our Corporate Life - Parish Review

It is true also of us as a body. We have a calling and a purpose. We have been given the opportunity to take stock through the Parish Review. As you know, you were surveyed as to your opinions about the parish. Archdeacon Sarah Moss reported back on that survey and conducted a workshop on Vision, Mission and Values with us. Since then she met twice with Vestry to discuss the outcomes and work on some goals for the next 3 years.

Our existing Vision, Mission and Values statements proved to be nicely in line with what she discovered in the exercise.

Vision: *Growing in Faith, Love and Mission*

The **mission** statement was tweaked slightly so it now reads: To glorify God and fulfill God's purposes by: bringing people to faith in Christ; deepening our discipleship; being equipped for ministry and mission in the name of Christ.

The **values** statement now being: We are a welcoming Church family that gathers for vibrant and joyful worship, studying God's word, prayer, and community life in which we experience support and a sense of belonging as we seek to live out our Christian faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Vestry has not been shown the actual feedback comments but rather we were given a digest of them by Sarah. From this review and the scoring of various factors, we have adopted the following goals for development of the parish.

Inspiring Worship: "Review Sunday service delivery to ensure optimum engagement for all members of the church family." This entails the formation of a worship review group who will consider all aspects of the services to see how they may be improved. An immediate start is being made with the introduction of participation of the children in some of the rostered roles in the 10am service on 3rd Sundays starting next week.

Authentic Loving community:

- "To establish a coordinated process for welcoming newcomers and incorporating them into the life of the church.
- "To establish a coordinated process for Pastoral Care."

Growing in Christ: "To establish a small group of fixed term duration for a series of theological discussion & reflection. (Café Theo)"

Relevant Outreach: "Explore ways of connecting our outreaches (Messy Church, mainly music, Selwyn Centre and 3DC) with our church life."

May God bless you with a concern for the spread of the Gospel in NZ and with a self-disciplined focus on the purpose he has given you. May God bless us together as we aim to grow in love, faith and mission.