

St George's Anglican Church, Battery Point, Hobart

26/12/2021

WEAKNESS & SERVICE the POWER of GOD

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

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Story telling is a very important way of passing on information in different cultures. This is often used in Church services by the preacher. Today I would like to try and help you get a feel of what it can be like in a church service in another country. In West Africa a service might go for 3 or 5 hours. When the preacher comes to a part in his preaching where he is telling a story he starts by saying, "Story". The congregation respond together saying, "Story, story."

So I am going to start with a story.

"Story."

Response - "Story, Story."

A few years ago when on a Wokabout Short Term Mission trip to Peru with a group of people from Australia, we visited the village of Pampamichi. This village welcomed tourists. Our group stayed the night at the invitation of the villagers. That night another group of visitors also stayed in the village. In the morning our group gathered for our morning devotions together on the grass outside the house we slept in. Just as we were about to start the leader of the other group came over. He asked, "Are you Christians?" "Yes, we are." We replied.

"I have not been reading my Bible for some time and I have been missing fellowship can I join you?" "Yes of course, sit down."

After the devotions we asked him about himself. "My name is Alexander. I am from Spain. I studied 7 years for the priesthood in Valparaiso but left before finishing. I am here working in Lima with a Catholic relief agency among slum dwellers and children."

I asked him. "What are you teaching the children?"

He replied, "We are teaching them some education, some games, good ways to live."

“Are you telling them about Jesus?” I asked.

“No we are not telling them about Jesus.”

*“What?” I replied, “You have studied for 7 years learning about the Lord Jesus Christ and you are **not** telling the children the most important thing they need to know. Have you asked Jesus into your life?”*

At this he began to cry and replied, “No, I have not.”

“Would you like to ask him into your life right now?” I asked. “Yes, I would.” He said.

With tears streaming down his face he prayed and asked Jesus to come into his life.

I find this amazing, that God should take me, an Australian, all the way to Peru. A Spaniard who has trained to be a priest all the way from Spain. That we are brought together in some remote village in the jungles of Peru so that he, Alexander, could come to faith in Jesus Christ. God can do amazing things in a person if they make themselves available to Him.

In Mission work using a story telling method often involves someone telling the Bible passage in story form and someone else repeating the story. Then there are questions which open up discussion. We do not have time to learn from an open discussion. However these are the five questions can be used.

1. What do we learn about God?
2. What do we learn about man?
3. What did we like about the story?
4. What did we not like about the story?
5. What can we apply to our lives from the story?

1. What can we learn about God?

What I learned from this encounter of Paul were these things.

1. God gives grace to help in the time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

2. God gives joy.
3. God gives compassion.
4. God has a plan for our lives.
5. He desires people give themselves to Him.
6. In God's grace he gave Christ Jesus – He was once rich & coming to live amongst us became poor, He gave Himself so that we might become rich.

2. What can we learn about people?

What I learned from this encounter about people were these things.

1. *We experience trials*
2. *We can experience poverty*
3. *As Christians we want to share, to serve, to be significant to God*

STORY

"STORY, STORY."

The experience of the Macedonians can be something we can all experience.

Recently there have been some bad bushfires reported on the TV news. Some people went from prosperity to poverty in minutes.

A story I heard in the past was of a group of farmers from a church in Finley NSW who gathered materials together and went to Victoria for a week or so to help farmers who had lost everything.

These Finley farmers had been suffering themselves from the drought. Some had also suffered from bush fires. A group of Victorian farmers had gone to give them practical help in their time of need. It turned out that one of the Finley farmers

found himself helping a farmer in the Marysville area who had given his time to go and help the farmers in NSW. The farmer from Finley was the very farmer he had helped. Now that farmer, who is still recovering from his losses, was helping as he was able. This is an example like that of the Macedonians begging Paul to allow them the privilege to give out of their poverty to help those in need in Jerusalem.

In the reading we see that Paul informs the Corinthian church of the need of the Christians in Jerusalem. They were quick to respond and wanted to get involved and made a commitment to do so. Now Paul is saying, *'That was good but you did not follow through with what you said. You started well but you need to be good finishers as well. You need stick ability.'*

3. What did we like about the story?

This is what I liked about this account in chapter 8.

- 1. Paul found God's grace active in the life of the Macedonians*
- 2. They did not want to be left out of the opportunity to serve God and others*
- 3. They first committed themselves to God and then they committed themselves to the ministry*
- 4. There was equality. That does not mean equality in everyone having the same. No I suggest that it was a very different idea of equality. The privilege of giving and being able to give not just money but time and the ability to get involved.*

STORY

STORY, STORY

I think of a time when I was in India. Some money which was being sent to us ended up being sent by the bank to Lusaka in Zambia instead of Bangalore, India. We were running out of money to buy food. One of our Indian colleagues handed me some money. At first I said no, it is okay. My colleague looked at me and said something like this, *"I am very disappointed that you are not allowing us to have the privilege of giving. It is not just you from the west whom God gives the grace to be able to give even if we do not have much."*

I felt like a child who had just been punished by a parent. I accepted the gift, for which I was actually very thankful. I was more thankful to the Lord for the lesson learned to encourage and allow others to know the grace of God in giving, not only money but of themselves to God in service to Him.

4. What did we not like about this encounter of Paul with the Corinthians?

Perhaps for you living the Christian life is a challenge and hard to handle. I leave that up to you and let you decide.

Perhaps the more important question at this point is this.

5. What can we learn from this encounter?

Here is what I learned from this encounter of Paul with the Corinthians.

- 1. It is more blessed to give than to receive.*
- 2. That I should be ready, like Paul, to allow others – even in their trials and poverty – to have the privilege of serving. That this serving may be in giving and it may also be in practical involvement.*
- 3. That it is important to first give myself to God and then I will be in a better position and attitude of mind to give myself to serve in what ever capacity God wants.*
- 4. I also learned that it is important to finish what I have started.*

It has been a privilege to serve the Lord in mission for around 50 years both overseas and here in Australia.

I am thankful that the church I attend in Sydney has had an overseas mission focus.

Equally important the church has a focus on mission and ministry within Australia.

Many from the church have been workers at Christmas holiday Beach Missions.

The Church is also supporting the full time schools workers in local high schools and members go into the community schools to teach Scripture every week.

For many Christians their involvement with mission is mostly to help by giving money. That is very important. In this encounter of Paul with the Corinthians it is easy for us to get the impression that is all that Paul is referring to.

Paul, I think, is actually saying to the Corinthians and us, to get more involved in what God is doing than just giving money.

The Macedonian Christians gave the example of their availability. They first of all gave themselves to God. In giving themselves to God they were then in a condition to give themselves to the privilege of serving God in missions in keeping with God's will.

Have you given yourself to God so you are in a condition where He can direct you to serve Him in the ministry He would like you to be involved in?

Some people are what we might call "*half timers*". They have worked for a number of years, life is good. Generally everything is on track. If they are married the kids are growing and doing well. They may be nearing retirement age and wondering what next. They feel they would like to do something more for God. Use their skills in God's service.

Half Timers – you might say.

Like a football match. At half time the coach has a pep talk to try and encourage the players to go out into the second half and do better.

Some time ago the Australian Socceroos played Uzbekistan in a qualifying match in which they won. After the match the Australian coach said that in the first half the team did not play so well. After the halftime break they returned to the pitch with renewed vigour and determination and won the game.

Perhaps we can ask ourselves this Christmas, "*What am I going to do to make the rest of my life count for God?*"

Perhaps God challenged you about serving Him, in Missions or in the Church?

You can make a commitment today like the Corinthians did when they heard of the need of the Christians in Jerusalem. Their problem was that they made the commitment but did not follow through to complete their commitment.

Will you consider responding to God this Christmas and making yourself available to Him to serve Him in mission or in whatever capacity He has planned for you. That may be here in Australia or to the uttermost part of the earth.

Have you heard about the need for graphic artists in missions?

Or the need for people with IT skills?

Perhaps studying music you learn of the need of ethnomusicologists in missions.

A young woman we know did her Masters in music composition and was considering going on to get a PHD. She felt that God had a plan for her to go to Nairobi, Kenya to establish a music academy in order to help children from slum areas have the opportunity to learn music and at the same time to learn about Jesus. Following the Lord's leading He used her over there.

We can give ourselves to God and prepare ourselves for serving Him in the way He wants us to serve Him.

When we make ourselves available to God we will be in a condition and attitude that God will be able to use us.

Mission starts with you and me in our church being available to God. It spreads as we are obedient to God's Word and the prompting of His Spirit in our lives.

If God is causing you to think, that maybe there is something more you could be doing not just giving money!" Then talk to with us if you think we can help. Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today. Remember 'tomorrow' never comes.

It is fitting for us to think about Paul's challenge to the Corinthians to get on and finish what they had started to do. To excel in giving, not only their money, but themselves first to God and to His service.

Paul said to the Corinthians, *'You excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, in love but see that you also excel in this grace of giving.'*

V12 says this, *"For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have."*

This quote is perhaps a paraphrase of verse 12.

"It is not your ability that counts, it is your availability.

It is then that God can use your ability."