

MBCC March 5th 2017

PP Romans 15: 13 – 20

PP 'A Change of Ambition'

For Doreen and I, today has been a real encouragement and I believe a really important step forward in the ministry of MBCC.

Please pray for and support Joji and Chihiro as they further develop the Japanese ministry at MBCC, and reach out to the many Japanese in Auckland, who do not yet know Christ.

PP Here at MBCC we understand how important it is that we all hear God's Word in our own language. Hearing God's Word in another language may give us **head** knowledge, but when we hear it in our own language, it goes to the **heart** much more quickly. That is why MBCC makes such an effort to assist you all in this way.

PP As many of you know when we first arrived in Japan in 1974, we began a full time, 2 year language study course, at the **OMF language school** in Sapporo city. Sapporo is the capital city of the island of Hokkaido in Northern Japan. It is a large, flat city, a little like Christchurch. We believed God called us to Japan and it was our goal to learn Japanese so we could effectively preach the Gospel to Japanese.

PP In front of Hokkaido University, in Sapporo city, is a statue of a Dr Clark. Hokkaido University was opened in 1872, and Dr Clark was there, from America, for just 8 months in 1876.

Why would a university have a statue for a foreign man who only taught for such a short time? At that time, Japanese officials were striving to achieve rapid modernization of that country in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. They were especially intrigued by Clark's work in America. In 1876, the Japanese government hired Clark as a foreign advisor to establish the Sapporo Agricultural College (SAC), now the Hokkaido University.

During his eight months in Sapporo City, Clark successfully organized SAC, which had a significant impact on the scientific and economic development of the island of Hokkaido and Japan, and made a lasting imprint on Japanese culture.

Also, despite the fact that teaching of the Bible was forbidden in government schools, Clark managed, after considerable effort, to secure approval to make use of the Bible during ethics instruction.

In doing so, Clark introduced Christian principles to the first entering class of the college. They, in turn, influenced the students in the second class, who enrolled after Clark's departure.

In 1877, shortly after Clark's departure, 31 students of the newly established Sapporo Agricultural College converted to Christianity, signing a document drafted by Clark titled, "The Covenant of Believers in Jesus."

PP Some of them later played important roles in the fields of Christianity, education, and international relations during Japan's continuing modernization in the early 20th century. Alumni such as **Uchimura Kanzō** (Christian thinker and evangelist) and **Nitobe Inazō** (Quaker, educator and diplomat), are still known nationwide in Japan.

Our theme as a Church this year is 'Reach one teach one' and Dr Clark, as a Christian professor, disciplined a group of Japanese young men. The day he returned to the USA he is quoted as saying "Boys be ambitious". The Japanese had this inscribed on a statue of Dr Clark in front of Hokkaido University.

PP However, we know that this was not all he said. According to those who were there, what he actually said was “ **Boys be ambitious for Jesus Christ**” As you can understand the university did not understand the importance of “for Jesus Christ” so did not include it.

Dr Clark's boys were some of the best students in the university, and later went on to be Christian leaders in Japan. Because of Dr Clark's love for his boys, in just over 8 months of disciple making, he is still remembered in Japan today.

PP Although Dr Clark was like a missionary to Japan, there are also some wonderful examples of men and woman who were saved overseas, and returned home to be change agents for Christ in their own cultures.

For China, one that stands out is '**John Sung**' who gained the highest academic levels America could offer, and yet returned to China only wanting to preach Jesus Christ to his own people. As he sailed home to China from the US, he threw most of his academic certificates into the sea. He did his highest in academics, but did not want it to hinder and tempt him to be diverted from service to Christ. John Sung just kept one certificate to show his mother. For Dr Clark, and men like John Sung, Jesus was everything and they counted all else as not that important in comparison.

In the time of the Early Church the apostle Paul clearly stated his goal in life.

PP Romans 15 : 20

'My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard.'

Or we could say 'my ambition is to tell the Good News to those people who have never heard about Jesus.'

Although the Jews heard the message of Jesus through Paul's preaching, by this stage in the history of missions, it was very clear that Paul's focus was to share God's love very intentionally with the non-Jews, the Gentiles. **Verse 20** Notice Paul says - My ambition has always been to.....

You may ask: Why would someone be so passionate about telling others about Jesus Christ? Why do we send missionaries to tell people about Jesus Christ?

Why was Paul ambitious for Jesus Christ?

- Paul met with Jesus and discovered that Jesus was alive and had opened the way for him to be forgiven of terrible things he had been doing by killing and imprisoning Christians. His guilt and shame was removed, his sin was forgiven.
- What he thought was important was totally changed and his life focus is never the same.
- He was now able to say, 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.'

OMF international began work in Japan in 1952. This work was begun because of the need and the very few missionaries in Japan at the time. Now in the 21st century OMF International continues that ministry, but has also expanded it to include reaching out to all East Asians living overseas. This includes Chinese, Thai and the over 1 million Japanese living outside of their home country.

PP The focus of OMF Diaspora (Those scattered abroad) Ministry is summed up in the vision statement: **'The worldwide movement of East Asians, disciplined to build up the body of Christ, among their own people and beyond.'**

Interestingly many overseas students and young people on working holiday visas are only with us for about one or two years. The first and best opportunity to touch their lives with the gospel is their first 6 months in NZ. This meeting with Jesus totally changes their lives and they return home with a new and eternal purpose.

For Joiji and Chihiro, their call from God is to reach out to the Japanese students and families living

here in NZ, and disciple them so that if or when they return to Japan they can stand strong as Christians. They need your prayer and support please.
As a Christian what is your life purpose? How has your life changed since meeting Jesus Christ?

From **verses 13 to 20 of Romans 15** we see something of Paul's passion and goals in life.

PP 1. V 13 – 14 Paul's passion was to encourage the church. (The Church)

His prayer for the church was that they would be filled with joy, peace and confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was convinced that they knew God's Word so well, that they could teach each other.

Disciple makers are always people who encourage the church like Paul did. You too can do this. Ministry to those who come to NZ is like this: we bring people to Christ, help them integrate into the local church, and if they return home encourage them to be part of the local church in Japan or China or wherever.

Shinobu san returned to Japan and linked with Alison and other returnees.

Here is what Alison North wrote in the family prayer letter;

'I had a reunion with two Japanese mothers who were connected with MBCC and are now living in Japan. It is a huge adjustment to come back, especially for their children. If Christians, who come back, can make it through the difficult transition and work out their identity as a Christian, and a Japanese living in Japanese society, they can be a powerful witness and blessing to the church here.'

PP 2. V16 & 20 Paul's passion was actually His life purpose. (The Message)

For Paul preaching the gospel was not a hobby, or a part-time occupation he did when convenient. No, it was his life's purpose to do when convenient and not convenient. When you have a sharp focus in life, your life becomes very meaningful and powerful, because your energies become focused on what gives you much joy.

From **verse 16**, we see Paul's task as this "to present you (Gentiles who had become Christians) as an acceptable offering to God, made holy by the Holy Spirit"

Through faith in Jesus Christ these people had become children of God, who knew their sins were forgiven, and that they were made holy through the gift of the Holy Spirit when they believed. Believers set apart for God.

In **Verse 20** Paul puts his life purpose into one phrase " My ambition has always been to preach the Good News"

As Christians, if our main life purpose is to make money, live for ourselves, be successful in family and business only, then we will be disappointed.

Lets' spend a moment and reflect on our life. 'What is the purpose of your life?'

'In one sentence can we say what our life purpose is?' (Silence)

PP 3. V 20 Paul's passion was for all who had not yet heard. (The Lost)

Even today I struggle a little when I see so many churches in NZ.

When Joij and Chiro disciple Japanese and send some of them back to Japan what are these new believers facing? Japan and Turkey are two of the most unreached people groups in the world. Unreached: means a group of people with the same language, culture and ethnic roots who have not heard the Gospel.

In NZ there is at least one church for about 1000 people. In Japan, it is 1 church for 17,000 people. Only 0.5% of the population of Japan worship in a Christian Church each Sunday. Many Christians

find it so hard to even do this, because of distance, family pressures, busyness of work and life and spiritual oppression. In Japan there are 1800 towns and small cities that do not have even one church.

So in Japan, it is not difficult to find people who have never heard. Most people's image of the church is stained glass windows and a western religion. In many ways this is true of most who come to our country, either as students, or for work.

I wonder what you thought about Jesus Christ and the church before you came to MBCC, or met a Christian, and heard the Good News?

One of my greatest joys is to be able to do Bible study with people who have never heard, see them begin to understand, and then come to Christ, be baptised, and join the local church. After that they return to their home country, it is an even greater joy as they integrate into a local church in their city or town.

Please pray for Joji and Chihiro as they reach out to people, who may only be in NZ a short time. Our prayer for them, should be that those of us who remain in NZ, and those who return home, do so with the life purpose of being "Ambitious for Jesus Christ."

The encouragement for us all is, that God has made it all possible by the gift of His Holy Spirit.

PP 1 Corinthians 4:20 (read)

"For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power."

Put God's plans and purposes first in your life, and never rely on your own strength or ideas but only on the Holy Spirit.

God does not primarily want our ability but our availability.

When the early disciples were threatened and told to stop preaching the observation of the rulers of the day was **Acts 4:13**: "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the scriptures (not like the Scribes and Pharisees).

They also recognised them as "men who had been with Jesus"

Our relationship with Jesus is the key to our passion for the church, passion to make God's will our life purpose, and our passion to see our friends come to believe in Christ.

Jesus put it another way :

' Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you'. Matthew 6:33 This is so encouraging and exciting.

Be passionate about 'God's' work and he will look after 'your' work!

Dr Clark was a very well qualified professor who taught to the best of his ability, and was known to be a very hard worker. However, he never forgot his main calling, to pray and ask God to help him find creative ways of sharing God's love with his students.

Let's all do our best in whatever we do in life, and never forget our call is to be disciple makers for Jesus.

William Carey said:

"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."

(Invitation to those who have not yet believed.)

Prayer