SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

MOVED by Others

A legacy in the north

In November 2011 about a thousand people jammed under the huge marquee in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. They came to witness the presentation of certificates to thirty elderly men and women for faithful leading. Several were among the first baptised believers in the area just fifty-five years ago. One by one they responded to the announcement of their name, some with the assistance of a walking stick; one lead by a seeing-person. Gratefully they took hold of the certificate and returned to their seat.

Then an amazing thing happened. When the name of Kukiwa was called, the hunched-over, elderly man steadily made his way to the front. Hundreds of people began to cry out loud and wail. The sound was deafening and incredibly moving. Why did they wail? All knew of this man, the “man with the book” who’d spent most of his life walking bare-foot around the mountain ranges of Papua New Guinea, learning local languages and sharing with hundreds of villagers about Jesus. In most cases, it was the first time people had ever heard of Jesus. Kukiwa demonstrated compassion, commitment, sacrifice and devotion to his Lord.

Who could not be moved by such testimony?! Kukiwa’s vision and response to take the Good News to people who had not heard inspired others in his community to do the same.

Yet for Kukiwa and others like him to be able to share Jesus, they had to be told themselves. It was the work of Australian Baptists (Harry Orr and Albert Kroenert and others), that first enabled the message of Jesus to be communicated in the area.

As a participant in an Australian Baptist Church, you are part of that legacy. In 1949, some Australian Baptists were moved by the vision of Defence Force Chaplains during World War II. Over a period of 60 years, dozens of Australian Baptists served in PNG. They were supported by and prayed for by thousands of Aussies back home.

What was the result of this ministry? Now, as a proportion of the population, there are twice as many Baptists in PNG than in Australia. Over 400 local congregations, some in remote mountainous locations; others in urban environments, still actively take the life-giving message to areas of PNG where the cross-cultural workers did not venture. They, in turn, inspire us.

Faithfulness through difficult times

William Carey was raised in the obscure, rural village of England. He apprenticed in a local cobbler's shop, where the nominal Anglican was converted. He enthusiastically took up the faith, and though little educated, the young convert borrowed a Greek grammar and proceeded to teach himself New Testament Greek.

When his master died, he took up shoemaking in nearby village, where he met and married Dorothy Plackett, who soon gave birth to a daughter. But the apprentice cobbler's life was hard—the child died at age 2—and his pay was insufficient. Carey's family sunk into poverty and stayed there even after he took over the business.

"I can plod," he wrote later, "I can persevere to any definite pursuit." All the while, he continued his language studies, adding Hebrew and Latin, and became a preacher.

Carey was increasingly dismayed at his fellow Protestants' lack of missions interest. He argued that Jesus' Great Commission applied to all Christians of all times, and he castigated fellow believers of his day for ignoring it.

Carey didn't stop there: in 1792 he organized a missionary society, and at its inaugural meeting preached a sermon with the call, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God!" Within a year, Carey, John Thomas (a former surgeon), and Carey's family (which now included three boys, and another child on the way) were on a ship headed for India.

Thomas and Carey had grossly underestimated what it would cost to live in India, and Carey's early years there were miserable. When Thomas deserted the enterprise, Carey was forced to move his family repeatedly as he sought employment that could sustain them. Illness racked the family, and loneliness and regret set in: "I am in a strange land," he wrote, "no Christian friend, a large family, and nothing to supply their wants." But he also retained hope: "Well, I have God, and his word is sure."

He learned Bengali and in a few weeks began translating the Bible into Bengali and preaching to small gatherings.

When Carey himself contracted malaria, and then his 5-year-old Peter died of dysentery, it became too much for his wife, Dorothy, whose mental health deteriorated rapidly. She suffered delusions, accusing Carey of adultery and threatening him with a knife. She eventually had to be confined to a room and physically restrained.

"This is indeed the valley of the shadow of death to me," Carey wrote, though characteristically added, "But I rejoice that I am here notwithstanding; and God is here."

In October 1799, things finally turned. He was invited to locate in a Danish settlement in Serampore, near Calcutta. He was now under the protection of the Danes, who permitted him to preach legally (in the British-controlled areas of India, all of Carey's missionary work had been illegal).

In 1800, after seven years of missionary labor, Carey baptized his first convert, and two months later, he published his first Bengali New Testament. Carey continued to expect great things; over the next 28 years, he translated the entire Bible into India's major languages: Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, Hindi, Assamese, and Sanskrit and parts of 209 other languages and dialects.

He also sought social reform in India, including the abolition of infanticide, widow burning and assisted suicide.

By the time Carey died, he had spent 41 years in India without a furlough. His mission could count only some 700 converts in a nation of millions, but he had laid an impressive foundation of Bible translations, education, and social reform.

His greatest legacy was in the worldwide missionary movement of the nineteenth century that he inspired. Missionaries like Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, and David Livingstone, among thousands of others, were impressed not only by Carey's example, but by his words "Expect great things; attempt great things." The history of nineteenth-century Protestant missions is in many ways an extended commentary on the phrase.

Martha Plested

Ellen Arnold preached at the Wharf Street Baptist Church in Brisbane (now the City Tabernacle) in 1885. She had served for two years to that point, in India being one of the very first sent from Australia to join with British Baptists in mission. On hearing her tell of both the need and opportunity, 24 year old Martha Plested only recently arrived in Brisbane, volunteered. The newly formed Queensland Baptist Missionary Society accepted her for service and two months later she arrived in Bengal! Martha shrank from public speaking, "I do not like this public speaking. . . I had no idea when I offered myself. . . that I should be expected to speak in public."

She found coping with conditions difficult. "The wretched conditions of the people prevents one from enjoying the country, and the bad smells as you walk through the streets are quite sickening." Despite these and language learning difficulties, she came to love the people and the country.

Martha returned only twice to visit Queensland in her 37 years of service. During one visit in 1910, 800 people (nearly 30% of Queensland Baptists) packed the City Tabernacle to welcome her with a "hearty and sustained applause". She was described as "47.5 kg of goodness, 150 cm of monumental grace, our sister has compelled a verdict for Christ all along – from non-Christian as well as from Christian." (with metric conversion, quoting Rev Walter Barry in Parker, D., *The Martha Plested Story*. Brisbane: BUQ, 1986.)

The Five Barley Loaves

For Ellen Arnold it seemed like disaster, she had been in Bengal for hardly 18 months with Marie Gilbert. They had met in Teachers College in Adelaide, Ellen coming from Birmingham in England with her family, and Marie from Geelong in Victoria. They found they both were keen on missions and their minister, Silas Mead, stirred their passion further. They had been sent out to India. They had spent twelve months learning Bengali in Calcutta while a house was built for them in Furreedpore. These two were the pioneers for Australian Baptist missionary work, leaving Adelaide in October 1882.

But in May 1884, just 18 month later, Ellen was ordered home, too sick to stay. Her plans were shattered. She left Marie alone in their newly built house and travelled home. She recovered somewhat on board ship, but there was no way she could persuade the doctors to authorize her return.

Her pastor, Silas Mead, decided she ought to travel to the other Australian colonies and New Zealand and share the story. He wrote to all the pastors of Baptist churches, and Sunday school leaders suggesting that they should be involved in overseas missions, forming their own societies and sending out workers. And he suggested that this young teacher could share a vision of work among women in India. This became the Arnold Crusade, for she spoke in nearly all the Baptist churches in the Australian colonies and New Zealand.

As a result when the doctors finally decided she was well enough to stand the rigors of India there were four other women ready to travel with her. She had met Martha Plested in Brisbane and although she had only been in Australia for about six months having migrated from England, Martha was convinced that God was calling her to offer to the newly formed Queensland Baptist Missionary Society.

New South Wales wanted to send somebody, but nobody was available. In Victoria the VBMS asked Arnold to look out for somebody who could go for them. In Castlemaine she met Ruth Wilkin and persuaded her to come and meet the VBMS committee. In Geelong Marian Fuller attended Ellen's missionary meeting, and she too came and met the committee. Victoria had been supporting pastors in India for a number of years, so the sending out of a pair seemed feasible. And back in Adelaide there was another young school teacher, Alice Pappin, ready and willing. The only problem was the needed finance for three workers from South Australia, but the country churches in the North asked for Alice to be their "own" missionary and promised the £150 a year for her expenses. So there were the five of them rearing to go.

They met up in Adelaide and were farewelled In Flinders Street Baptist Church. They were five single women, all in their 20s, prepared of God to serve in the Indian Subcontinent, prepared to visit the women of India in the isolation of their homes and tell them of a God of love.

Church leaders of the time debated whether single women ought to be sent to do this ministry, and travel unaccompanied. But the Indian culture was segregated and if women did not take the message the women would not hear, men could be sent later. At their farewell service in 1885, Silas Mead preached from the story about the feeding of the five thousand, what was so little among so many? They became affectionately known as the five Barley Loaves and are an icon of pioneering Australasian Baptist mission. For before the first man joined them in India in 1889 there were eleven of them, living together initially in Furreedpore learning the language and then scattering to start work in other towns of East Bengal for the colonial Baptist missionary Societies.

Ros Gooden, see also "R. Gooden, Five Barley Loaves: An icon for Australian Baptist missionary work, Oct 2004 (available on Moved website)