

Howrah Sandford Weekly Church Bulletin

23rd August 2020

ONE SUNDAY SERVICE ONLY IN THE PARISH: at St Thomas's Howrah 9.30 am Holy Communion)
There is also weekly online worship found on the home page of www.stthomashowrah.com.

READINGS:

Acts 21: 1-14

Psalm 119: 57-64

Luke 19: 11-26

SERMON: 'A Season of Opportunity'

In Acts chapter 21 we have Paul completing his missionary journey through Macedonia and Achaia and heading to Jerusalem with the money gifts he had collected for the poor Christians there.

Paul travelled by a trading ship that hopped between ports along the Eastern Mediterranean coastline. Every time the ship neared a port the captain had to judge when the tides were right and wind was blowing "ob portam", meaning towards the port, and only then could he safely bring his vessel to its safe haven. "Ob portam" is the origin of the English word "opportunity". It picks up on the idea that opportunity is when there are the right conditions to reach one's goal.

On the way to Jerusalem at the ports of call of Miletus, Tyre, Ptolemais and Caesarea Paul visited the little Christian communities to encourage them and kept receiving the ominous prophecy that in Jerusalem he faced opposition from fellow Jews and arrest by the Roman authorities.

Paul's friends concluded that the Holy Spirit was warning him to abandon his plans. They were, understandably, presuming his arrest would bring his fruitful ministry to an abrupt finish.

But Paul had reached an entirely different conclusion which was that he should continue on to Jerusalem, that he should be arrested and suffer for his Lord, and that somehow or other through this God would give him the opportunity to preach the gospel to the people of Jerusalem and the Roman leaders, perhaps even the Emperor himself.

What the Christians he visited had failed to realise was that many years before, at the time of Paul's conversion in Damascus the Lord had told Ananias, the one who baptised Paul, that "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." For Paul this set the tone for his ministry and motivated him when things got tough.

The last eight chapters of the Book of Acts make for gripping reading. Paul arrived in Jerusalem and blessed the poor Christians there with the money he had collected from the churches he had planted. Then things turned sour. At the Temple Paul was set upon by enemies who falsely accused him and started a riot. He was arrested and imprisoned and took the opportunity to bear witness to Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the local king and two successive Roman governors who were in a quandary about what to do with him. Eventually he used his right as a Roman citizen to resort to the final court of appeal to Caesar, the Roman Emperor himself. By the end of the Book of Acts Paul is in Rome waiting to testify to Caesar about Jesus.

Paul was a great opportunist. Like the captain of his vessel he was sure of his destination, he had the wisdom to judge favourable conditions and had the courage to act decisively. When he reached Jerusalem he did not bask in his celebrity status, or notoriety, but exploited it to testify to Jesus before the residents and visitors to Jerusalem. When he got caught up in the riot and was arrested he took every opportunity of the protracted legal case to testify to Jesus to the Jewish and Roman leaders. He counted it as a privilege to suffer for his Lord, and this enabled him to be bold. Paul was an opportunist for Jesus.

God has provided unprecedented opportunities for our parish:

- The Covid crisis is shaking up everyone's lives and stealing away the certainties, securities and comforts in people's lives

- The burgeoning population in our area. Of the 30,000 residents 29,000 are unchurched
- The prospect of an enthusiastic new minister with a young family, and with a passion and experience in church-planting
- A parish with lots of faithful, gifted, mature, enthusiastic members

THE TAKEAWAY:

The Gospel reading was the Parable of the Minas in Luke (similar to the Parable of the Talents in Matthew).

Think of it as the Parable of the Opportunities. God provides churches with opportunities to serve him and to make disciples. If churches take these opportunities they get more opportunities. On the other hand if churches ignore these opportunities through laziness or risk-averseness then the opportunities dry up and the churches shrivel. The choice is yours.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS:

- Give thanks for the appointment of Jamie Bester as our new minister. Pray for Jamie and Clare and children in this period of transition and for the Southern Beaches congregation as they farewell them.
- Give thanks for the life of Frans Sakul (St Thomas') and ask for God's comfort for Wendy, Rama, Rowan, Adela, other family and friends
- Give thanks for the life of Anne Mayerbach (St Barnabas') and ask for God's comfort for friends and relatives.

FROM THE MINISTER:

With a new minister soon to be appointed let's get updated and inspired about mission and ministry! **Online Bishop's Training Event** (10am-1pm, Saturday 19 September.) Register at www.bishopstrainingevent.com.

Prison Fellowship of Australia is conducting "**Art from the Inside Exhibition**" on the theme of PEACE at Waterside Pavilion, Mawson Place from opening at 6 pm this coming Tuesday.

With the love of Jesus
Andrew Lake
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