

May 13th 2012: Mother's Day: Moved By Others: Acts 8:1-17

This month is our Mission Month and as you can see from our display in the foyer we are following the theme that the Australian Baptist Missionary group has set for this month, which is Moved. Moved by God, Moved by others, and Moved by the need.

Today I am using their suggested sermon points to talk about how we need to be **Moved By Others** in our personal missionary endeavours.

Now it goes without saying that we are firstly Moved By God to want to spread the message of the Gospel in whatever way we can. God's heart is a Missionary heart. He sent His beloved Son to die on a cross so that the message of the Gospel should become available to every person in the whole world throughout all the ages. And in His love and mercy He rejoiced when we accepted that gift of salvation, and now He constantly seeks to move our hearts with His own Missionary zeal. And one of the ways He does that is through the influence upon our lives of other believers who are passionate about sharing the story of Jesus.

So in fact this title: **Moved By Others**, is clarified further by words such as Influenced by others or Inspired by others. So I'm sure that those of us who heard Wayne Field preach here last Sunday were inspired by his own personal dedication to sharing the Gospel, and influenced by his example.

The reason we are moved by the example of other believers is apparent when we consider the first sermon point which is **God Created us For Relationship**. He made us to be dependent on one another and to work together to achieve our major aims in life, and that becomes paramount in the body of believers—the Church which is the Body of Christ.

On Easter Saturday Terry, Roger, Paul, Amanda, Serena, Jake, Luke, Amanda's boys and myself worked together to move Serena into her new house. Each person, simply by their presence and actions, encouraged the others in their involvement. And that's how God loves to work in this world. Through teams of people working together because of their relationship with Him.

Now I just have to say that such is a very moving story!!! But the major point is that God calls us to work together, and it is in our being part of this huge team that is comprised of all believers in Christ everywhere, that we are called to inspire others through our commitment to Christ, and especially, to be inspired or moved to do or be more for Jesus and the Gospel by those believers that God causes to cross our paths. People like Wayne Field.

This is what happened in Acts chapter 8. In the previous chapter we have the account of the martyrdom of Stephen. He had proclaimed the message of Jesus strongly and continued to do so against violent opposition. Even before the Sanhedrin that had been

responsible for sending Jesus to the cross, he courageously stood his ground in proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. Crucified by them but risen and coming again as Judge.

This so angered them that they dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. Then we come to the beginning of Acts 8 and we find that on the day Stephen died:- ***a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.***

So it was the persecution that moved believers like Philip out of Jerusalem, but it was not the persecution that caused him and others to go everywhere preaching the word. When you stop to think about it Philip had every reason not to share his faith. Stephen had been murdered; there was turmoil and persecution all around. Yet Philip preached with such power that a whole community was converted.

It was his own personal commitment to Christ and the inspiration he received from the example of Stephen that led to his obedience. And what the second sermon point draws out of this story is the need for us to be **Inspired By Faithfulness rather than Success.**

You see Stephen was not really that successful. He did not see crowds of people coming to know the Lord through his preaching. In fact he died before he could achieve the great things that Philip went on to achieve. But he was faithful and that is what the people who put these sermon notes together want us to see.

Quoting from their notes we read:

Stephen wasn't personally 'successful' (he was killed!), but he was faithful. Perhaps Philip recognized his faithfulness and was moved and inspired by it and followed the same path. He was not an apostle. He was not a big shot....Philip's great power came from the fact that he loved Jesus, pure and simple...God used a layman like Philip to influence a whole culture for Christ.

As we consider the people that move and inspire us, what characteristics are we drawn to? Success, fame, fortune....or faithfulness?

I thought about that question and I realize that I am inspired most by the little people in the world's eyes who are just so faithful in their commitment. People in this church who have persevered so long and so faithfully in roles that others hardly notice because they believe that is what Jesus wants them to do, and they do it with all their heart and their strength for Him. I think also of an old lady that I met when I was preaching in a small village in the Philippines who was so crippled with arthritis that she walked with the aid of two sticks, and was completely hunched over with every step causing agonizing pain. Yet she was the first at every meeting and constant in her testimony to Jesus. I think of many I have met through the years in the churches where I have served as Pastor who have given sacrificial gifts that I didn't want to accept because I knew they had so little, but they gave out of their poverty because of their love for the Lord's work. I think of

others here who have gone on Mission trips despite their age and the financial cost because they are faithful to His calling.

Stories of faithfulness that have inspired me, and it is my prayer that I will live a life of faithfulness that will in turn inspire others.

But being inspired by the faithfulness of others is not enough in itself. The third sermon point is that we in turn must be **Ready To Be Moved.** Ready to respond to their inspiration and to do our part.

That passage in Acts goes on to tell us that the Apostles in Jerusalem saw what was happening in Samaria and sent Peter and John to check it out. They, inspired themselves by the faithfulness of Philip, returned to Jerusalem preaching the Gospel in Samaritan villages as they went, and were motivated all over again to share the Good News with as many as possible.

In this Mission month we too become aware through what we hear, of the amazing growth of Christianity that is happening in the world today. At present we are not seeing it in Australia but it is happening elsewhere. As the notes I have been given go on to say:-

In our world today, God is still moving, lives are still being changed and people are experiencing the same great 'joy' expressed by the Samaritans as they discover Jesus. Just as Peter and John went to check out the stories they had heard, we are reminded to look, listen and be aware of what God is doing

The point they make is that we need to hear about the things that are happening in order to be inspired and moved, and to hear we need to do something.

- If we are at all able we should go on a short term mission where we will see God working in the lives of many
- This month we can commit ourselves to attending the different opportunities given us to learn more about Missionary work in other countries
- Commit to reading a mission biography every month or at the very least once a year
- Subscribe to prayer letters sent out by missionaries. Take every opportunity given to put your name on a prayer news mailing list
- Invite a cross-cultural worker to come and share at your home group.

But of course just finding out and being inspired personally by what God is doing through others is not enough. We must be ready to take our place which is the fourth sermon point. **Taking Our Place.**

We all have a part to play in the Great Commission. The responsibility of sharing the Gospel is also the responsibility of every believer continuing to be involved while they have breath in their bodies, in making sure God's message goes forth in word and act.

We are all to pray and we are all to give and we are all to be lights shining in the place that God had put us. And we are also all to be aware of those special calls to go out of our comfort zone in some way, that God delights to give each of us.

As well as being listeners and learners, we have a role as the tellers, sharing what God is doing in our lives. We are part of a long line of God's people, taking our place.

There are people that we come into contact with that may be looking to us for some direction for their lives. Watching how we live out our faith, listening for our stories about God in us. Will they hear them from us? Will they see Jesus in us? Will they hear through us of the exciting things that God is doing in the world today. Will we, as we are moved by the faithfulness of others, become so passionate to be what Jesus wants us to be in the place where He has put us, that others around us—believers and non-believers—will in turn be moved by us to move a step closer to Jesus.

That's the challenge of this Mission Month.