

## "Learning from faithful servants"

Proposition: the way God prepares us for great things is to let us prove our faithfulness in small things.

I want use the Carroll family quite allegorically this morning. By that I mean as I open up the Word with you I want to illustrate what the Word is saying not with stories or picture images but with examples of how Pastor Melanie and the Carroll family have lived out in our midst these principles of scripture.

**Mark 9:33-35**

**(Matthew 18.1-5; Luke 9.46-48)**

***<sup>33</sup>Jesus and his disciples went to his home in Capernaum. After they were inside the house, Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about along the way?" <sup>34</sup>They had been arguing about which one of them was the greatest, and so they did not answer.***

***<sup>35</sup>After Jesus sat down and told the twelve disciples to gather around him, he said, "If you want the place of honor, you must become a slave and serve others!"***

Around two and a half years ago Melanie, Peter and Becky came over to RBC to spend a couple of weeks with a scripture union program called 'Youth Serve' where young adults spend their holiday helping others in the community, cleaning, painting, gardening, cooking etc. One of Melanie's greatest passions is to teach children and youth to serve and to develop their leadership skills through service. After that Youth Serve event the Carroll's just stayed on and continued just as they had begun, humbly and skilfully serving people. For months they travelled from the North Shore several times a week so they could serve the church and the community here. Then they did what I have never seen another family from the North Shore do; they moved out west with us so they could be a part of the community here and serve even more.

Usually when pastors go away on sabbatical leave churches shrink. That didn't happen at Ranui Baptist Church when Pastor Melanie, with good support from Graham Davis and the team, ran the church during my study break. When I returned home everyone just kept telling me how loved Pastor Melanie had made them feel and how she had been helping so many and serving so faithfully.

Trish Clarke whose discernment I respect so highly, and who really enjoyed Mel's ministry said to me, "Russell if the church is ever able to employ another pastor please consider Melanie because she has no agendas or secret motives, and she just wants to serve the Lord. She is a minister of the highest calibre of character."

I have certainly found Trish's discernment to be accurate as we took Melanie on as a Pastor at Ranui Baptist Church.

A couple of months ago at our monthly staff meeting Melanie shared with us all that they were going to be moving to Australia and we prayed for her, Sean, Peter and Becky and began to prophesy over her.

Pastor Tai said these words over Mel as we prayed and they have stuck in my mind ever since. He said "Melanie, God says you have been faithful in 'small things' now He will put you in charge of 'greater things'." Tai was quoting Matthew 25:21.

Now when Tai first said that I thought, “ I don’t get it. Mel is trained in teaching, accounting and pastoring, she has given over 20 hours a week on average in skilled service and has never let us pay her anything, she runs so many groups, she is so effective as a preacher and as a pastor. She has this amazing ability, a visionary skill to see how things can be much better and what changes need to be made to get there; small things???”

Now I know the word Pastor Tai brought was from God even though I didn’t get it, so I just sat on it, and thought about it. As I did so the story of Philip the great early church evangelist and miracle worker kept coming into focus and I began to see parallels between our Melanie and the Carroll family and this mighty, mighty man of God and his family.

I would suggest to you that the greatest, city wide revival recorded in the bible happened under Philip’s ministry in Samaria.

Let me remind you what happened in that part of his life

*Acts 8:4-13*

### *The Good News Is Preached in Samaria*

*<sup>4</sup>The Lord's followers who had been scattered went from place to place, telling the good news.*

*<sup>5</sup>Philip went to the city of Samaria and told the people about Christ. <sup>6</sup>They crowded around Philip because they were eager to hear what he was saying and to see him work miracles. <sup>7</sup>Many people with evil spirits were healed, and the spirits went out of them with a shout. A lot of crippled and lame people were also healed. <sup>8</sup>Everyone in that city was very glad because of what was happening.*

*<sup>9</sup>For sometime a man named Simon had lived in the city of Samaria and had amazed the people. He practiced witchcraft and claimed to be somebody great. <sup>10</sup>Everyone, rich and poor, crowded around him. They said, "This man is the power of God called 'The Great Power.' "*

*<sup>11</sup>For a long time, Simon had used witchcraft to amaze the people, and they kept crowding around him. <sup>12</sup>But when they believed what Philip was saying about God's kingdom and about the name of Jesus Christ, they were all baptized. <sup>13</sup>Even Simon believed and was baptized. He stayed close to Philip, because he marvelled at all the miracles and wonders.*

To me, Melanie hasn’t been used of God to do small things. From my perspective she has been used of the Lord to do great things. There are families in the church, including the Watts family, and just as many in the community who will tell you God has used Melanie and her family to bring to faith and helped them make life changes that they never would have on their own.

There are people in our fellowship who dream of doing great things for God, you dream of leading worship in front of large crowds of people, or you dream of helping orphans or you dream of being used of God to work miracles etc.

Philip was a mighty man of God and so how did he get to be like that? Did some great evangelist lay hands on him? Did he have a mighty vision or supernatural experience one day? How did Philip who was once an ordinary person like you and I become someone that God could use to change a whole city in just a few weeks?

Do you want to know who prayed for him or what study course he did? The scriptures tell us.

**Acts 6:1-6**

*<sup>1</sup>A lot of people were now becoming followers of the Lord. But some of the ones who spoke Greek started complaining about the ones who spoke Aramaic. They complained that the Greek-speaking widows were not given their share when the food supplies were handed out each day.*

*<sup>2</sup>The twelve apostles called the whole group of followers together and said, "We should not give up preaching God's message in order to serve at tables."<sup>3</sup>My friends, choose seven men who are respected and wise and filled with God's Spirit. We will put them in charge of these things. <sup>4</sup>We can spend our time praying and serving God by preaching." <sup>5</sup>This suggestion pleased everyone, and they began by choosing Stephen. He had great faith and was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they chose Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and also Nicolaus, who worshiped with the Jewish people in Antioch. <sup>6</sup>These men were brought to the apostles. Then the apostles prayed and placed their hands on the men to show that they had been chosen to do this work.*

Yes the apostles did pray for Philip but do you know what prepared him to be a mighty man of God?

I don't think that it was the apostles prayer, I think it was how he lived his life over the next two to three years.

What was Philip doing with his life over the next few years before God used him as a transformer of a city?

He was being faithful in small things. He organised food for the widows and orphans, I imagine he peeled the potatoes, he served the tables, he wiped down the tables after they had eaten and he did the dishes.

He was faithful in doing what He could do for the kingdom.

So many people sit on their buttocks and think when I have more time, when the kids are older, when there is less pressure at work, when God has given me a vision or shaken the earth then I will step out and do great things for God. I would say to people like that, don't wait. Just start serving the lord faithfully somewhere now, just as Philip did and just as Melanie and the family have done at Ranui Baptist Church. There is never an ideal time. Just do something for Jesus and do it well. Do it without looking for recognition or thanks, wash dishes for Jesus, make up food parcels for Jesus. Just do something now. Because it is when we are faithful in small things that God will trust us and commission us to do greater things.

Even though Melanie is very highly educated and skilled you will often find her praying for folk, wiping down the tables and doing dishes after 'Sonshine Club' or some event, she will often be visiting the lonely or the hurting, putting her time into training others for leadership. Faithful.

Dr Jim Corbett is a mutual friend of Ryan's and mine. One day I said to Jim; "Jim I have been studying the Word on spiritual gifts and I think you have them all. How does that happen?" In his usual humble way Jim said to me. "Oh, I don't know. I just do what He tells me to do today and then He seems to give me the ability to do more things."

If we continue to track with the story of Philip the evangelist the parallels don't finish there.

While Philip is having a ball just helping people, clearly being used of God mightily as I believe Melanie has in Ranui. God says to Philip get up, leave the revival and start running down that dirt track into the desert.

How crazy, how difficult to understand is that? Leave where things are going well and where you fit in perfectly and start running off to somewhere unknown in the desert. You can refresh your memory of the story during the week from Acts 8:26-40 but basically as Philip is running off down the track to nowhere he 'just happened' to come across an accountant who had a heart after God, who 'just happened' to be reading from the book of Isaiah from the easiest place in the whole OT to explain who Jesus is from. When he explained the gospel to this accountant in the desert, there 'just happened' to be some water there and so the accountant could be baptized into God's family immediately. Then God takes Philip away and he continues to preach in other towns.

To the logical mind it seems sensible for Sean to take the job in Australia, it's a good position. Becky and Peter will miss us but we can see how they could do really well in that setting. But the area and church they are going to doesn't appear to have the same evangelistic opportunities or needs that Mel is so skilled at addressing. It's kind of like she is running off with her family from the place that she has been so effective in, and not knowing what is ahead.

If I can continue the story of Philip the evangelist I want you to note two things. Historians tell us that the first national revival that ever took place in world history began in Africa in Ethiopia by this accountant that Philip led to the Lord. Philip did great things for God by just doing something faithfully one day at a time. He didn't know what would follow each act of obedience. He didn't know what would happen when he left the place where things were going so well to run off into the desert which actually sounds a lot like Australia to me. But our Lord who finds us to be faithful in small things will trust us to do great things for His Kingdom.

One final encouraging observation about Philip's life.

Now ancient Caesarea was the club med, the Queenstown, the ultimate holiday destination of the Middle East and Philip went on to become the pastor there.

#### ***Acts 21:8-9***

***<sup>8</sup>The next day we went to Caesarea and stayed with Philip, the preacher. He was one of the seven men who helped the apostles, <sup>9</sup>and he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.***

I not only believe that God will continue to use Pastor Melanie and Sean in greater ways but that God's blessing for their faithfulness will flow on through their young adults.

Now Philip had four daughters who were very well known in the early church for their ability to hear God's voice.

Sean and Mel have two pretty amazing young adults who have the intellect and discipline to be doctors or lawyers etc.

What I am guessing will happen though is this. That servant heart that is in mum and dad is also in them. Becky I expect will become a great teacher who brings Jesus into the classroom and a young lady that God can use to reach children around the world with the gospel.

Peter, I am guessing will do a social workers degree and bring the gospel and real intelligent support to the needy and the marginalized and Peter, Becky, Sean and Pastor Melanie will continue to be faithful in serving the Lord daily according to their gifts and God will continue to give them more gifts and trust them with greater things.

I pray that as we thank the Carroll family and pray for them that God will truly bless them and that you and I will have learnt some valuable lessons from Philip the evangelist and these faithful servants.