

From the Pastor's home office

Matthew 7: 24-28: The Wise and Foolish Builders

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching.

It is Asian history month and since I noted Black history month, I thought I should honour this month as well. Later this month, I want to feature the history of our Korean Presbyterian churches but for now I thought I would tell you about some of our missions in the Pacific rim (which I hope sort of fits into Asian history month theme).

I remember going to the 2010 General Assembly and listening to this gentleman give greetings from Vanuatu, the islands formerly known as the New Hebrides. Vanuatu was celebrating thirty years of independence and this gentleman was very excited about this. He was also very excited to share his thankfulness for the missionaries who had been sent from Canada to bring Christianity to the southern islands. This had created many changes in their culture and country to which they were still thankful to God. He wanted us to know this. At the time, I appreciated his earnest gratitude but I not know the history that went with this gratitude. Ten years later, I had the opportunity through the World Day of Prayer to learn about these missionaries and why many in Vanuatu are still so thankful for these missionary efforts.

This gentleman was telling us at General Assembly that he was thankful for the work of John and Charlotte who were Presbyterians from Nova Scotia. Though Rev. Geddes ministered in two or three churches in the Maritimes, his goal was to be a missionary to some place in the Pacific rim. So he preached and raised money locally to be able to be appointed through one of the mission organizations in Britain. John and Charlotte were not the first missionaries to be appointed to these islands called Vanuatu but they were the ones who stayed for twenty five years making a significant impact on the lives of the various people groups within these islands. Charlotte and John heard the word of God telling them to be with these people in Vanuatu and they acted on this. It was challenging work but they stayed.

When they arrived to the islands in 1848, there was already a history of Western men in ships coming to the islands. The first ships were early Western explorers giving their sailors a break until they did farther exploration into the Pacific rim. This was not just a couple of days. They might stay for close to a month. This had been started by Captain Cook in the 1700's and continued into the 1800's. The ships, by the mid 1800's, were no longer chartered for expeditions but were commercial boats looking for whales and sandalwood to take oil back to the Western market. Many of the crews were not very kind to the indigenous people on these islands and so the indigenous people were very hostile to missionaries when they arrived - with good reason.

It took a year or so for John Geddes to realize what was happening in these Southern islands and

why the people hated the missionaries so much and valued the lives of their own people so little. Life on the islands may have appeared idyllic from those coming from the West but life on the islands was challenging with malaria, cyclones and tsunamis being constant factors with which to live. The sudden appearance of Western sailors for weeks at a time only added to the communities struggles. John Geddes took the time to listen and to experience the situation before he acted. He persuaded the various the chiefs to come together and make a unified force to stop the ships from coming to their islands and being such a destructive force. He and Charlotte spent a great deal of time showing that God valued all of the people on the islands including women and children. They spent a great deal of time teaching about God's love through Jesus Christ, teaching about nutrition, and dispensed basic medicine. John and Charlotte also saw great value in enabling the people to read the Bible for themselves and then being able to teach others. While John spent time translating the Bible into the native language, Charlotte spent much of her time teaching. They were very pleased to see those they had taught, take the Christian faith to other surrounding islands.

Though John and Charlotte left Vanuatu in 1872 for Australia, they were so pleased to hear that the Presbyterian Church in the New Hebrides had been formed soon after they left with Indigenous people as the ministers and elders of these church communities.

This missionary couple made sure that Vanuatu was built on a strong foundation of the people hearing the words that they were valued by God and acting on these words by creating communities where they could live peaceably together.

I did not know that I, as a Presbyterian in Canada, had ties to a series of Polynesian islands in the Pacific rim through my faith in Jesus Christ until this person came to give thanks at that General Assembly. May these bonds continue as we journey in our faith worshipping God and acknowledging that we are all part of the same sure foundation.

The Day Thou Gavest, Lord is Ended

This is my favourite evening hymn. It is a beautiful tune with words that talk about the unending praise that happens around the world on any given Sunday. I like this idea and think about it every time I sing this hymn.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pigh8VHr-ZE&ab_channel=drwestbury