

Sewerage is a problem.

I found this out when I went to work at the Marsden A Power Station in 1980. Built in the early 60's it was isolated. So, as well as a power station all of the housing for the many employees and the families who would work there, also had to be constructed. It was called "The Power Station Village", and was about 100 to 150 homes.

Now all things being equal, these homes were inhabited by human families, who all ate and drank and did what humans do, meaning there was a great need for some kind of waste disposal system. All this I learnt on my first few days as a Gardeners Labourer at Marsden A.

I learnt this because one of my jobs was to help the Gardener, a great Christian bloke by the name of Ray Brown, to look after the self-contained Marsden A Sewerage Treatment Plant.

All of the effluent from those 100-150 homes went hurrying down a series of pipes into a big pit, prettily hidden away behind a stand of tall pine trees on the northern end of the village surrounds.

From this pit, the raw material was pumped up onto two large sandy bays, where it was left to dry and decontaminate in the sun.

It was Ray's job to look after the place, keep it tidy, running, and up to speed. Which was sometimes difficult because it would flood in heavy downpours and the pump would jam with the not natural waste material that people put in to the system.

In all this the Gardener was assisted by his trusty, reliable, loyal Labourer, who saw more of natural human waste than was good for any manly teenager.

Ray used to jokingly say that he was sure that they only gave him the job of looking after the place because he was a Christian.

One of our many tasks, after hauling the pump out to unjam it, or clean it in some way, was to tidy up the two large sandy beds, where the effluent lay drying in the sun. Once the stuff was let out of its hole in the ground it would flood the beds and then over time filter into the sand and the solid waste would dry into a very dark, thin crust. Which then needed to be cleaned away.

This was another glorious duty. To rake this dried human fertiliser up and dispose of it as best we could. We did this managing to scratch between the tomatoes and water melons which grew there in magnificent abundance.

And I was doing this very thing when I experienced my call to the ministry. I was raking muck over sand in the Marsden A Power Station Sewerage Treatment Plant, when, "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying"

What happened was this. Janet and I had converted to Christianity about 4 weeks before, but I had had a hiccup in the sense that I found it very hard to give up smoking marijuana and the life that went with that. This struggle had continued on for these 4 weeks, until one night I came home from work and knew something was wrong. I knelt down by my bed and started to cry; I knew things weren't right. As I did this, I heard Janet come in through the sliding door of the little flat that we shared, and went out to meet her.

I gave her a hug, moved into the lounge and looked at the ceiling. I said to the Lord Jesus, "I give up smoking". As soon as I did, I felt a huge hand reach down and grab a knot above my head. Then I felt an enormous pull, and a huge heavy cloud and weight lifted from my body immediately.

I was free. My desire for the life I had been living, the weed I had been smoking, just disappeared.

The next morning, I went to work, and the first job of the day was cleaning up the sewerage treatment plant and Ray and I met there at 7am. As we got going, I told him what had happened, and as you can imagine he was pretty happy, he beamed like a man with a new car.

Then just as I was beginning my raking, he stopped, looked at me and said, with tears in his eyes ... "one day I think you'll be a Baptist minister".

I felt the heavens open once more, but this time, something like rain was falling all over and around me, after it had stopped ... the only thing I ever wanted to do ... was be a Baptist minister.

God called Jeremiah. God calls priests and ministers.

God calls each one of us, to continuous conversion and the work of Christian living. To build and to plant. To not be afraid. To love our neighbours, to love them in word and deed. To act and speak the truth, even for those outside the fold ... like Naaman the Syrian and the widow at Zarephath. To live patiently, kindly, and compassionately with one another. To seek the good of others where possible, to be the kinds of people we would want others to be for us. To live in faith, hope and most of all as the Apostle Paul says, ... to live in love ...

Sewerage is a problem. But in every sense, God gets the better of it.

Amen.