

Ordinary 19 Year A 2020 Gen 37:1-4; 22-29, Rom 10:5-15, Matt 14:22-33 **Scott MALCOLM**

I met Ray in March 1980. It was my first day of work at the Marsden A Power Station after being on the dole for a few months. He walked out of the Gardeners Shed on to the tarmac surrounding the area and headed towards me and the Maintenance Superintendent, who was taking me to my position as the newly appointed skilled labourer, working in the garden.

Ray was like no other man I had ever met, I don't know what it was, but he was different, there was simply something about him, and when I saw him step out on to that tarseal, I could see it.

Mind you, I should have gotten a little bit of a hint, when I turned up for work, expecting to be going in to what was good naturedly called, " the Village Gang." On most NZED power stations the remoteness of the location, meant that there was always a power station village for the workers, this provided an incentive for the qualified people they needed to work there; the houses were nice, and the rent cheap.

Most power station villages had a village gang, a group of skilled labourers whose job it was to look after the grounds and general maintenance of the place. This was where I thought I was going to be working when I turned up that first Monday morning.

In fact, I had planned it all quite carefully. Janet's brother Peter and I were good mates, we enjoyed smoking a bit of marijuana together, and he had put me on to the possibility of a village gang position. It was my hope that I would be sitting on a ride on mower and smoking marijuana for the rest of my working career... Well as you can see, that didn't happen.

I turned up for work that first morning and the maintenance superintendent said to me, you won't be working in the village gang anymore; you'll be working in the garden with Ray Brown. My reply was "Oh, he's a Christian isn't he?" The superintendent looked a bit shocked and surprised, and said, "That's not going to be a problem is it?" My reply was, "No, Christians are supposed to be good people."

Now, the place I spent my teenage years wasn't big, and my mum and step father ran a restaurant and takeaway bar underneath the local working men's club. If you know anything about small town New Zealand, you will realise that there wasn't anything we didn't know about what was going on, and if you knew my mum and step father, you'd know that was doubly true. So I knew who Ray Brown was.

I had been to school with a couple of his kids, I'd known some of his old drinking mates, and I knew that one day, he had turned his back on it all, and become a Christian. So when I walked out of the administration building on to the tarmac, to go and see Ray, I shouldn't have been surprised. But I was.

Ray was just a little bit older than I am now, when we met properly. He was shorter and thinner than I am, had been away to the Second World War as an 18 year old, and had lost a wife and a daughter to cancer and a car accident, a returned servicemen's farm to bad management, and he'd been an alcoholi. He was now the gardener at the Marsden A Power Station, working for the NZED.

I was 20, about 40 kilo's heavier than I am now, rode a motorbike, had an ear ring in this ear, long hair down to the middle of my back and an attitude to match.

On that first day, Ray took me in to the gardeners shed, showed me around and welcomed me. He then asked me if I wanted to go to his place for lunch, and I said yes. When we sat down to eat with his wife Beryl, he said to me, "We say grace here" ... and he did. As soon as he started praying, I knew someone else was in the room.

Over the next few weeks, Ray told me about himself, his family, his life, his problems and worries and concerns and he told me about the help the Lord Jesus had been to him ...

Janet and I were living together. I was on the drugs a lot of the time, I was very unhappy. My life didn't seem to be adding up, and when I listened to Ray and watched him, he had a peace I knew I didn't have, but that I needed, and wanted.

So one day in the gardeners shed, surrounded by the smell of blood and bone, bags of potassium nitrate and peat moss ... I said, "Lord Jesus, I have had control of my life for the past 20 years, and I haven't been about to make anything out of it. If you can do anything with the rest of it, you are welcome to it!"

"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

... And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?"

"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus.

Thank you Ray.

Thanks be to God.

**AMEN**