

## The Battle for Beaumont Street.

The headline in the Newcastle Herald was dramatic and the following article stark. The residents, businessowners and workers in Beaumont St were fed up and so called for a meeting with the local council and police. Beaumont Street is one of the reasons I came to Newcastle to become the minister at Scots Kirk – based just off Beaumont Street. It is at the centre of a great area with numerous cafes, restaurants and bookshops. So, what is wrong with it...? Why is there a battle? And what does it have to do with the Church?

At the end of the street where Scots Kirk is based you will often come across people sleeping rough in doorsteps, shouting abuse in the street or out of their heads on drugs or alcohol. Personally, I have witnessed and been the recipient of the vilest abuse. I have also seen parents who are reluctant to take their children down the street. And we have had to put up with people who thinking they are God's gift to music arm themselves with a loudspeaker and give us their tuneless and painful rendition of Elvis. A few weeks ago, a young man, returning from work, was stabbed to death because he asked someone to stop littering. Whilst there are many good things still on Beaumont St – the violence, displacement, abuse and weirdness has left a sense of darkness, frustration and hopelessness.

What can be done? The police have promised more patrols. The Council have suggested more CCTV and more literal cleaning of the streets. Others have talked about the need for dealing with social problems such as homelessness, alcoholism, drugs and poverty. All of this is important. But it is not enough. In a sense this is dealing with the symptoms and not the root causes.

So where does the Church come in on this?

The Battle for Beaumont Street begins – and ends – here. Not just with Scots Kirk but also with our brothers and sisters in our church across the road in Generation Church. But why the Church? We can't solve the alcoholism (although we do support the wonderful work of AA who meet in our hall). We can't deal with all the poverty needs – although again we support the work of organisations like the Salvation Army and others who seek to deal with this. We can also point out that many of the causes of societal breakdown are self-inflicted wounds caused by the rejection of Christian principles and the replacement of them with 'progressive' doctrines – especially on the family.

The point is that this is primarily a spiritual problem – with economic, social and psychological implications. In our morning services we have been looking at the Book of Acts (although we are taking a small break just now to look at the Lord's Prayer). In Acts Ch. 16 we get a great insight into what it means for the church to influence a city.

The city in question is the city of Philippi in Greece. In response to a vision seeking help, Paul and his companions arrived in the Roman colony of Philippi. Firstly, they met a local religious businesswoman called Lydia, who became their first convert. Then they were plagued on the streets by a demon possessed female slave – who they liberated from her demons. For since they were brought before the city magistrates and thrown into jail – where the Philippian jailor and his family were amazingly converted. In short, the whole city was disrupted and turned upside down. In the next chapter Paul and his companions were accused by a mob of being ‘these who have turned the world upside down’. That is what Beaumont St needs (and Hamilton, Newcastle, NSW and the whole of Australia). A radical church which preaches and lives the good news of Jesus Christ. A church which prays, loves and cares. A church which through the power of the Spirit heals the broken, binds up the wounded and brings justice and peace to the community.

Over the next few weeks as we continue to look at the Lord’s Prayer in our morning service and Ecclesiastes in the ‘Alive at 5’, we will see just how that works. We are not people who go round casting out demons – if only life were that simple! (notice the reluctance of the Apostle to engage with the demonically possessed woman in Philippi). But we do seek to destroy the works of the devil by proclaiming and living the Christ who came to do just that. It is as we live for Jesus, pray and grow in our faith that we become both salt and light for the community. Salt in that we preserve what is good and provide taste. Light in that we both reveal the Darkness but even more that we show the one who is The Light – and who can bring true enlightenment, life and love to a people who so desperately need it.

Join us in this great battle.... a battle we fight – not with the weapons of this world but with the spiritual weapons that God has given us (read Ephesians 6:10-20) ....

David Robertson

Scots Kirk

Jan 24<sup>th</sup> 2025