

## **Guided by the Holy Spirit**

**Acts 13 and 14**

**23rd May 2010**

**Equip @ 10.45, Engage @ 7.00**

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We have been journeying with the Apostles ,the first church leaders as they oversee the beginnings of the church, A church that began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and changed everything. Now Jesus' followers had the encourager and friend that Jesus had promised them before he went back to heaven -

(John 14: 16-17, (MSG))

Jesus said: I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take him in because it doesn't have eyes to see him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be in you!

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Christians all over the world are celebrating that event today its Pentecost Sunday.

We can only imagine what it must've been like as the Holy Spirit who had been around since the beginning of time and worked through some special people through the old testament became a friend to ALL who believe and trust in Jesus. We can only imagine the feelings of the disciples who had celebrated many great highs with Jesus, sunk low to there knees by the cross and then raised again by his resurrection only to have him ascend or leave to go back to heaven 40 days later. This clip made me think of the Change in the disciples perceptions as the holy spirit came upon them ...

Watch Prince Caspian clip - scene 2 - 9m30s to 12m30s

Wow what a journey, and change of view, a low low and an amazing high. Those who know the story will know that things get very hard for the 4

adventurers and they continue to bounce from highs and lows throughout their journey and quest.

And at Pentecost the apostles too began an amazing journey, spiritually, geographically. From that day as they begin communicating the Good news. All through the book of Acts as we have read and listened they took the good news of Jesus out to Jerusalem and beyond. Proclaiming that what the Jewish people had hoped for and looked for - throughout their history (throughout the old testament) - was happening. Namely Through Jesus God was opening a way for the whole world to come back to him through faith and trust.

So we come to our Reading for today. Barnabas and Paul are on the leadership team of the growing Christian centre in Antioch, and the congregation would be loving there wise words and wonderful witness, when ... along comes the Holy Spirit! This happens whilst they are praying and fasting and focussing on God, they are expectant for something to happen tuned in to the Holy Spirit - and the spirit speaks (probably through one of their prophets) -

'Barnabas and Paul it's time to travel, to spread the word further.'

### Cyprus

So off they go to enlighten the Jews - Gods chosen people. But the first big encounter is with a roman leader, a great soul to win for the kingdom, but it's an accepted truth that there is no advancement of the gospel without opposition and here Paul comes up against a manipulative sorcerer. At this point the power of the Holy Spirit is seen again working through Paul enabling him to counter the enemy and guide the roman leader to belief.

Tom Wright says this - One obvious lesson from all this is that when a new work of God is going ahead, you can expect opposition, difficulty, problems and confrontation. That is normal. **How** God will help you through (and **how long** he will take about it) is another matter. **That** he will, if we continue in prayer, faith and truth is given.

I am clinging on to this nugget of truth as I journey along the discernment process as to whether I am destined to be ordained or not. All I can do is continue in prayer, faith and face the truths that I see.

### **Iconium**

Our intrepid 2 journey on, though notice now that Paul is in charge, Barnabas clearly recognises Paul's gifting and accepts his leadership especially as they are on home turf for Paul. Now they are preaching in the synagogue and Paul is appealing to them to recognise that their history does indeed point to Jesus, that his resurrection is God's way of granting through his glorious grace complete forgiveness of every believer's sins. The crowds follow the 2 eager to know more and are encouraged to continue in God's grace, to be humble and play their part in God's story.

The dynamic duo continue to preach but gradually the local Jews get fed up of what seems to them a message that they have to accept that their job as God's special people is done, they burn with righteous indignation. The guys are driven out but still arrive in Iconium full of joy and there he is again - the Holy Spirit guiding them on. They leave as so often in their wake 2 groups of people - the angry aggressive people who don't want to know the good news and the spirit filled local believers.

Of course in each place Paul and Barnabas were visiting not just the religious centre but the community or civic centre with a life message not just a Holy message - the message being - all you are hoping for, all you are searching for is here available now.

Tom Wright sees that as a big challenge for the church- to tell a story, a story that people can own and that ultimately leads them to Jesus. What a challenge! more of that when I sum up at the end.

### **Lystra**

Next up is the Monty Python moment from Luke the author of Acts or 'maybe 'The legend of Dick and Dom' for you younger ones. Paul and Barnabas heal someone foolish and they are worshipped as gods, at first because the Lystrans are talking in their own language Paul and Barnabas don't quite know what is happening - just that the crowd seem very happy about the healing then suddenly they realise what's going on. When they deny it they try to explain quickly the story of God (one commentator imagines

Paul jumping onto the altar that was to be used to kill the bulls) only to end up being stoned by the same people who were just worshipping them (egged on by the angry Jews who seem to be following them round with cloaks and daggers.) Fortunately Paul survives this horrific attack and he and Barnabas travel to Derbe to recuperate - continuing there teaching.

Once recovered they travel back to the churches they have supported, even Lystra.

and as the first of Paul's big journeys draws to a close we see the apostles travelling from town to town appointing local leaders in each church, and through the laying on of hands and praying they entrust them To God, that they will be strengthened not just by the words of encouragement and the letters that will be sent (Galatians) but ultimately and most importantly -- by the Holy Spirit.

So what can we draw from this journey for our journey today:

1. The message will be misunderstood in many ways and new works of God will meet opposition.. but ...
2. If we are to spread the word - the good news - we need to tell a story, our story needs to be **told** but more than that it needs to be **lived** out in such a way that

**as we grow in our relationships** and with Jesus - others will follow us and be attracted by what they see,

**as we have fellowship** with God and with others, they will join us in receiving his forgiveness and his grace and ...

**as we pursue our journey of discipleship** inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit others too will be inspired and then they will have **their lives changed by the transforming Holy Spirit of God.**

Living out is the hard part - we need the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us avoid becoming as Tom Wright puts it 'a bunch of vaguely religious cows in a field, mooing on Sunday mornings and chewing the cud the rest of the time.'

It can be a roller coaster of highs and lows as the apostles found out but that's when we can feel the most alive, that's when we learn what it is to have life - life to the full. living life to the full for Jesus following the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

According to the director of ordinands who I saw at a meeting this week  
Bishop David sums up the action of God by saying:  
God in Christ does 2 things - First he comes alongside us, second he  
changes us.

Which ties in with a final quote from Bishop Tom Wright -  
The word of god is **uncomfortable** but **unstoppable**

Amen