

Preparing a life for mission

Last week 2 people pulled out of helping with the Braehead primary school trip to Dounan's so as Chaplain to the school I was asked if I could help out. I have to say it was a brilliant week. The kids were good fun and had a blast. There were lots of adventure activities – including climbing 50ft up a tree. I have to confess that I am not a great fan of heights but when you have a group of 20 kids are egging you on there is a little bit of pressure! Before I had gone up I had said to myself whatever you do don't look down. Buy 40 ft I was shaking, I thought look up if you can't look down. That didn't help. I was quaking in my boots when I realised that I was actually perfectly safe. I was connected by a rope and pulley to the instructor on the ground and I could feel the rope tugging me, encouraging me to go on, reassuring me I was safe.

There are situations in life when we feel like we are between a rock and a hard place. We don't gain any comfort from looking up, down, to the back nor to the front. But when we remember that we have a connection with heaven and we feel it tugging / encouraging then our perspective on the situation can be totally transformed. It is still a tricky situation but we gain a new courage, a new strength.

Let me ask – is there a situation you are facing at the moment that you need to be reminded that there is a divine connection through which the Lord wants to

reassure you and strengthen you and help you in? Through which he is tugging and saying you can do this with my help?

Today we are witnessing the establishment of a heavenly connection between God and his people, his church. The Holy Spirit is the divine connection between us and God. It is the one when we realise he is there can bring a transformation to any situation.

What else could it have been that transformed this ragamuffin group into a missionary movement that would change the globe? It is also the power that is changing us today.

Open to the passage with me p1092.

Verse 8 Jesus outlines the plan

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth”

This verse is a kind of summary of what we will see happening in the whole of the book of Acts. The gospel will be proclaimed in Jerusalem, persecution will break out and the gospel will go outward in a ripple effect – right to the very heart of the empire – the epicentre of the known world – Rome itself.

After saying that he rose into the sky. They looked, they maybe squinted in the sun. Their vision may have been blurred as tears filled their eyes. Still gawping I wonder if the first one to catch someone in the corner of their eye near jumped out of his skin because in as we can see in verse 10 as they were looking intently in to the sky

Verse 11 “suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking in to the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

And so verse 12 they return to Jerusalem.

It is a journey from the mountain top to reality

From Mountain Top to Reality

How do you think the conversation went when they got back to Jerusalem? Stunned silence? Grown men and women crying?

The memory of the mountaintop with Jesus, the spiritual high of the last 40 days had been brought to a sudden stop. They were back in the valley – back to reality.

“What now?”, says one. *“Wait”*, says another. *“Wait for what?”* *“Just wait like he said”*.

Verse 14 “ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers”. Evidently they too are convinced now.

They turn to prayer and they turn to the word. By verse 20 they are finding God guiding them - in verses 15-19 Judas’s gruesome demise is noted. And they are finding God speaking to him through his word. A verse from the psalms comes to mind, they are to choose another leader.

Prayer and the word, the scriptures, become the staples and foundations for this new community. Through the word God will speak to his people and through prayer the people could speak with God. All the while the Spirit illumining and enabling both.

These two things were to become the guiding lights for the church.

But they can be pushed out in our desire to put on activity after activity. We push out time to pray and look at the word as individuals and as a congregation. The prayer meeting has been dropped from many many church agendas. It is seen as less important. It is seen as the last option when it should be the first. The least we can do when it should be seen as the most we can do. Why? Because in prayer we are acknowledging that we are looking to God to move in and through the activities that we do.

So that what is happening in the lives of individuals is a deep work of God. We need to be praying not to twist God's arm but to demonstrate the openness of our hearts and the understanding in our minds that this is God's church, his work, done his way

Let me ask. How much does reading the bible and prayer play a part in your weekly experience? We can see in the early experience of the church these things were vital. It is the same for today. Through bible reading and prayer our faith will grow. Our relationship with God will grow. We will hear God speaking on a more regular basis and see the hand of God moving in answer to prayer. There are still some bible reading notes to be found in the foyer and on the stand where we have tea and coffee. There is a little bit of discipline required but even 5 minutes a day is better than nothing at all. It can help centre you at the beginning or the end of the day. And who better to be centred than on Jesus and his word.

We all have mountain top experiences but life for the most part is not lived there. God is a God who understands reality and wants to help in and be part of your daily reality and more importantly he wants you to be part of his daily reality. As we read the word, as we pray it is those time we may feel the heavenly tugs that re-invigorate, that strengthen, that encourage.

Just in passing there are two interesting things

1. that the qualification for Apostleship was that they had been with Jesus and were to have seen the resurrection.
2. They cast lots to decide. Lots were used in the Old Testament and this is the last time they recorded as used in the New Testament. Lots were used as a means of saying – God you please decide. But a new era was about to be ushered in where guidance would come in a different manner. But this was a community who did not just rely on human wisdom but were very much dependant on God to lead them. That is something well worth noting.

The reason they were all there was because it was a harvest festival – Pentecost. But Pentecost was also the anniversary of the giving of the Law to Moses on two tablets of stone on Mt Sinai. As John says in his gospel

John 1:17 the law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

From Law to Grace by the Spirit

Law – doing good works in order to get to heaven. Going to church. Being nice. Doing this, doing that and never being able to do enough. That was all about to end.

Instead new life in Christ, a fresh relationship with God, unmerited unlimited love, a place in heaven was to be granted for free – to those who would truly put their trust/ faith in Jesus and receive him as the rescuer and leader of their lives – ushered in by the coming and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Instead of change from the outside in the change would come from the inside out.

Interestingly I got a email this morning telling of a Iranian Muslim woman who whilst exploring the Christian faith in Scotland said

*'I think this is the difference between Islam and Christianity: we have to try our hardest to please Allah (through law) and in Christianity God loves us even though we are sinners...that is **really** good news! Why do people in the UK think this is boring?*

On the anniversary of the Old the New would come. God's timing is perfect.

Vs 1 On the day of Pentecost they were in the same place – praying?

Vs 2 When something that sounded like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven. The breathe of God filled the house. Did they spill out onto the street? Did others come to see what the noise was?
Vs 3 Then what looked like tongues of fire came and rested on each of them (120 1:15). Vs 4 They were

filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the wonders of God in foreign languages.

Did this really happen? Well Luke the historian has done his research and is convinced.

What is going on here? Lots of things but first let's look at what is happening via the Holy Spirit.

In a sense it is as if the church, the people of God, were lying dormant and suddenly the power supply was switched on. BOOM! The breathe of God comes and breathes life into the nostrils of the Church. And it takes its first breathes.

In a sense this was a one off experience – the church can only be birthed once but we see more fillings of the Spirit coming

Let's look at 4:31, note it is after a time of prayer!

4.31 They had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly

Stephen just before he was martyred

7.55 Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven

So there are other times in the experience of the church when she can be filled with the Holy Spirit but

they do seem to be linked to persecution or proclamation. What the Holy Spirit ministers is a kind of reassurance for service. Heavenly tugs if you like. The enabling to go on even in the most difficult of circumstances to witness for God. It is the sensing of his strong hand upon you. I pray for it every Sunday as I seek to proclaim the word. We do, can and should be praying for it as we seek to serve God at work, through the church programmes and so on. It is not necessarily a feeling and may only be seen in retrospect but it is a reality. Because God wants to help us to live for him. God wants each of us from 8 month to 80 years to be a living witness for him – a missionary if you like wherever we are. Now that doesn't mean we go around with pirth helmets bible bashing folks but it does mean that we have peoples spiritual well being much more in mind and if we believe we have found something good then we should share it – by inviting folks to Church or Tuesday club or house group or Christianity Explored or the Christmas services. I am not saying anything new here. This is what the church has believed and been experiencing for 2000 years. Isn't it amazing? And there is more. There is much more to be discovered.

From local to global

In this instance the filling of the Spirit leads to other known languages being spoken. Stephen was filled but that didn't happen to him. So there is something

unique here. God is saying that Jesus is Good News for all peoples – Jew and Gentile, slave and free.

Each heard the good news in their own language. That is partly why the Christian church has translated the bible into so many languages. That is why Hunter Grier has in his spare time been doing some translation work for a Christian Organisation. He is joining in on a Pentecostal type initiative. Translating something of the good news into the language of the people. It is also why we have modern translations of the bible – translated so that

Vs 11 we hear the wonders of God in our own tongues.

God's vision is a world wide one. We too need to ensure that we always add to out thinking the global dimension. We are going to hear in coming weeks of how Hunter is going to Africa to be part of that translation work.

We are having our lives prepared for mission this morning aren't we? Mission, living for God in the day to day, the 9 – 5, living with the enabling and help of the Holy Spirit, living as part of his world wide church.