



## HOMECOMING – HOME-LEAVING Acts 13:1-12

Today we continue in our exciting study of the book of The Acts of the Apostles – or as William Barclay correctly calls it “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.”

We know from Dr. Luke in his first book – the gospel bearing his name – that after the resurrection and before Christ’s ascension – the remaining disciples are commanded to return to Jerusalem and to wait until they have been clothed with power from on high (**Luke 24:49**). They actually followed his command and stayed continually at the Temple praising and worshipping God (**Luke 24:53**). Right before his ascension in **Acts 1:8** he shares “When the Holy Spirit comes on you – you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

We know from all four gospels that the disciples were all chosen by Christ. He mentored and disciple them for three long years. They were the only eye witnesses to all Jesus had said and done. The Holy Spirit would not only enable them to be Jesus’ witnesses – and to tell the Jesus story with power and truth – it would actually clothe them – or fill them – with his presence and power. Jesus had invested three years of his life with them. Jesus did not want this truth to be lost – forgotten – or silenced. Until now – the disciples had been the only eye witnesses of the risen Christ. At Pentecost – this all changes.

As the disciples are all gathered together in one place – they experience a shattering noise – rushing winds – a spectacular vision. All of this takes place to demonstrate that a moment of divine revelation is occurring in their midst. The Holy Spirit – wind – fire literally drives them out of the upper room into the courts – the world – for all to see and experience. A new identity has come for the people of God.

It was more significant than the giving of the law to Moses at Sinai. They are driven out into the world – to a universal audience.

Dr. Luke makes it very clear to us in **Acts 2:8-11** that 16 different nations were present on the day known as Pentecost. From its very beginnings the church – the body of “Christ – the Called Out Ones – are multi-national – multi-lingual – and multi-racial. This is a very diverse crowd by all human categories or standards. However, a whole new unity or ‘community’ has come over them – or covered them. All human barriers are either removed or transcended.

This is the reason the day of Pentecost is so very important. Pentecost was and is the day the church was equipped for its mission and ministry to the world.

At Pentecost – the Holy Spirit reassures us our relationship to God continues in the present tense – not the past tense. The Holy Spirit empowers the church so the ‘Called Out Ones’ can fulfill the Great Commission in the name of the risen Christ. The disciples and all gathered in Jerusalem are no longer students and observers. The Holy Spirit won’t let them sit around the campfire singing “Kum Bah Yah.” They are sent out. They are changed from disciples to apostles. They not only experience change – but become the agent of change.<sup>1</sup> For every homecoming there is a home-leaving as well. This great God who we learned of during Advent who can call forth shoots from dead stumps – babies from barren wombs – and resurrection life from the tomb – is still at work in us.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. William Willimon – one of our United Methodist Bishops – shares “The Spirit is the engine that literally drives the church into the world to witness.”

The Book of Acts is what most scholars call a transitional book. It is sandwiched between the four gospel and the epistles for an important reason.

So in our study we have observed the transitions from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria. Today in our lesson we come to another very important transition.

In our lesson – Barnabas and Paul now fulfill the latter part of **Acts 1:8** – to the uttermost parts of the world. Today missionaries like Jessie, and Lori, and Jeanie from our church are helping us to fulfill this biblical mandate.

Both Dr. John Stott and Dr. James Boice believe that in **chapter 13** – we begin a new section and focus in the book of Acts. Dr. Boice describes it as the third stage in the expansion of the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

In **chapter 13** we find the beginning of the foreign mission movement. We already learned from our sermon on July 13, 2008, how this church at Antioch was established – and our sermon on Oct. 5, the role and witness of Barnabas in this very important fellowship.

The emphasis has now shifted from the mother church in Jerusalem to this church at Syrian Antioch. As a matter of fact we learn from **Acts 12:25** that Barnabas and Saul have just returned from their assignment of taking a love offering to the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering greatly.

The church fellowship at Syrian Antioch was a very active – growing – vital church. We know from **Acts 13:1** that this church family – like the gathering at Pentecost had people from every cultural, economic, racial, and national classification. The reason this is so important is that the more varied our backgrounds – and diversified our church family – the more people we can reach and touch with the gospel.

This is why it is important for us to have 5 different adult classes – and two services. We need more classes, worship services, small groups. Let us just look at the leadership team in **verse one**:

- **Barnabas** – a Levite (Jewish priest) from Cyprus – knowledgeable of Jewish scriptures, good understanding of Greek culture and how to relate God’s word in such an environment. Very generous. Very positive.
- **Simon or Simeon** – nicknamed ‘Niger’ meaning he was from Nigeria. He is obviously black or African. According to Dr. Barclay he might be Simon of Cyrene who carried Christ’s cross in **Luke 23:36**.
- **Lucius of Cyrene** – from Libya. Also black or African. Lucius is a Latin name – so he was brought up in Roman culture.
- **Manaen or Men-a-hem** – He was a foster brother of Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D. As adults they took very different paths. Herod murdered John the Baptist, mocked Jesus Christ, committed adultery with his brother Philip’s wife. Men-a-hem believed in Jesus Christ and became a disciple. He understood Roman culture and life very well.
- **Saul of Tarsus** – Jewish Rabbi, great scholar, Roman citizen from Tarsus, and enemy of the church who was converted on the road to Damascus.

This group was well-equipped to reach their diverse population that was under the authority of the Roman Empire. When asked what they had to offer the world – they could point to the greater kingdom and citizenship that God was building and establishing amongst them. This group was called not by the sword – but by the Spirit.

Dr. Boice believes that because this church was so well taught – and well-equipped and integrated it would be used by God to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. This is what we call the Great Commission.

Also, from **verse 2** – we see another vital ingredient why this church was so used of God in a great way. Because their spiritual life and disciplines included prayer and fasting kept alive by the power of worship – they had the capacity to discern God’s will. Lois always reminds us at our mission meetings the importance of prayer for missions and missionaries. We need another dozen prayer warriors just like her and Lowell. If you are interested – just let Lois and Lowell know.

So the church at Antioch not only studied God’s word (truth) – they sought Spirit-directed wisdom and instruction on how to put it into practice (the way).

So in **Acts 13:2** we know they were worshipping and fasting when the Holy Spirit spoke and directed them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work (beyond the local church) to which God had called them to do. Please notice that Barnabas and Saul (Paul) found their ‘life’s calling’ in the midst of praying – worshipping – and fasting

among fellow believers not on their own. God calls us to serve him together – to show the world how relationships are supposed to work.”<sup>4</sup> This is so important because so many in the church house want to do it their own way – or they leave or quit – or resign. I personally believe God’s Spirit spoke inwardly to the hearts of Barnabas and Saul – and the church leadership team confirmed it. The Holy Spirit gives direction and they actually follow it. We see that in **verse 3** the church lays hands on them to commission them and releases them for ministry and mission.

I am sure that it was tough to release these two gifted servants of God. They surely could have stayed and been a blessing to all. It would be like taking the 12 best disciples and workers from this church to start another.

- My mentor Eugene Peterson believes this passage teaches us two things:
  - Not all the believers became missionaries. We might do short-term mission work – but we are not missionaries. They stayed at home.
  - Some of them did become missionaries. They were sent out.
- We are in one of two groups if we are to be part of Christ’s church.<sup>5</sup>

One of the best things that Pastor Rick Warren reminds us of in his landmark book, **THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE**, is that you and I were made for a mission. God is still at work in the world – and he wants you to join him. This assignment is called your mission. God wants you to have both a ministry in the body of Christ – and a mission in the world.<sup>6</sup>

So in **Acts 13:4-12** we see the Mapquest itinerary laid out by the Holy Spirit. The journey by land and sea would be about 1400 miles. That is impressive.

We know from **verse 4** that one of the places they travel to is Cyprus. This is where Barnabas was raised and nurtured in the faith. Here we see this dynamic of homecoming - but also of home-leaving. They don’t stay long – they must journey on.

As we turn now to **verses 7-11** we quickly learn not to romanticize the mission field. When Paul and Barnabas were in Paphros they met spiritual opposition. Wherever there is opportunity – opposition will always be present. The kingdom of Satan is threatened to its very core.

Jessie and other missionaries often shared about the spiritual opposition they encounter on the mission field. It is not limited to the mission field – but they feel it.

We see that Paul – now an apostle – was given the gift of spiritual discernment and immediately recognizes this demonic force at work in Ely-mas. This demonstrates that the spiritual discernment process at the church in Antioch was on target about Paul and Barnabas. Paul is able to temporarily blind this man – and the Governor was moved by such spiritual power and became a follower of Christ.

So as we close our work for today – I hope you have realized that this important lesson has taught us that we should not be talking about things that happened at the church 20 years ago. What is God calling us to do now?

Every Sunday we experience the joy of homecoming. This is your church home – your sanctuary. Here we worship, pray, sing, laugh, cry. Then we leave this home to re-enter the mission field. Every Sunday after the benediction – we leave as God’s messengers and witnesses. We gather only to scatter again.

In both the Old Testament (starting with Abraham) and in the New Testament (the disciples) we are a ‘called out’ people.

Reflect upon this thought today and the rest of the week – If God is not calling you – who is? There is no such thing as an uncalled life. We all answer the call – to someone or to something.

I pray you answer the call of the eternal – and surrender all to the importance of this journey. There is homecoming – and then home-leaving.

Amen and amen!

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
January 11, 2009 – preached at both services  
All Rights Reserved - Copyrighted 1-11-09

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> William Sloane Coffin, **COLLECTED SERMONS FROM RIVERSIDE**, volume 2, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2008, page 61.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Coffin, page 62.

<sup>3</sup> James M. Boice, **“ACTS: An Expository Commentary**, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001, third printing, page 225.

<sup>4</sup> Charles F. Stanley, **LIFE’S PRINCIPLES BIBLE NKJV**, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2005, page 1285.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **CONVERSATIONS: The Message Bible with its Translator**, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, page 1705.

<sup>6</sup> Rick Warren, **THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE**, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, page 281.