



Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action
in the community of Cornton

Through the Bible

Exodus
Nehemiah
2Chronicles Luke
Malachi
Philemon
Job
1Kings
Ruth
Amos
2John
Acts 2Timothy 2Peter
Hosea
Haggai
Colossians
Micah
Jeremiah
Romans
1Chronicles
2Thessalonians
1Thessalonians
Johanna
Jude
3John
Revelation
Philippians
Lamentations
Deuteronomy
Ezekiel
Numbers
Ephesians
1Peter
John
Ezra
2Samuel
Mark
Leviticus
1Corinthians
Judges
Hebrews
Zechariah
1Samuel 2Corinthians
Ecclesiastes
1Timothy
Joshua
Isaiah
Titus
Galatians
Daniel
Psalms James

October 2013

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. (v.3)

The story is told of Richard Bellinger, a young boy in South Carolina who was the son of a Baptist minister. One Saturday night Richard decided to polish his father's shoes. The following night his father put a silver dollar on the desk of his son's room with a note commending his son for what he had done, and telling him that the dollar was his reward. The next morning, when the father put on his shoes, he felt something hard and metallic in one of them. When he took the shoe off and reached inside he found the silver dollar he had given to his son the night before. Along with the dollar was a note that simply read, 'I did it for love!'

Today we read of that same kind of love and devotion. Mary loves Jesus. He has not only been a good friend of the family, but in the previous chapter we saw him come to the grieving sisters to comfort them. Not only did he comfort them, but he brought back to them someone they thought they had lost – Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb; he gave him new life. Mary and Martha are so grateful they hold a dinner in Jesus' honour. While Martha is serving and Jesus is reclining at the table Mary comes and anoints Jesus. This is a simple act but one which carries with it great meaning and shows great love.

Mary takes an expensive bottle of perfume. It is called pure nard here and this was potent stuff. People would normally dilute it down to make it go further. Many kept it tucked away for a rainy day as it was worth a fortune. Mary isn't bothered. Jesus has done so much for her family and she simply wants to give her all to him. She pours the whole lot over him such is her love for him.

Do we recognise Jesus' great love for us and do we give in response? What do we give to Jesus? Is it the best we have and do we offer it freely and cheerfully?

Pray: thanking God for the precious gift of Jesus.

Reflect: do I freely give my all to Jesus?

Jesus replied, "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand." (v.7)

There is an old Hebrew legend that tells of a rabbi journeying on a mule through a wild country. His only companion was a rooster whose shrill crowing at sunrise awoke him to his devotions. He came to a small town at nightfall and sought shelter, but the inhabitants turned him away. Outside the village he found a cave in which to sleep. He lit his lamp before retiring, but a gust of wind blew out the light. During the night a wolf killed his rooster and a lion devoured his mule. Early in the morning he went to the town to see if he could buy some food. To his surprise he found no one alive. A band of robbers during the night had plundered the settlement and killed all the inhabitants.

"Now I understand my troubles," said the rabbi. "If the townspeople had received me, I would now be dead. Had not my rooster and mule been killed their noise or the light of my lamp would have revealed my hiding place. God has been good to me."

It is amazing how so often after the event we can look back and see what God has done. When we are in the middle of the trial it is so much harder. How many times if we are honest have we experienced difficulty and wondered what God is doing. We might even question his presence in our lives and question why he would allow things to happen to us. Yet God's plans are always perfect.

Here Jesus has washed his disciples' feet and they are a little confused. The disciples did not always understand what Jesus said and did. In John 13:7 Jesus tells them not to become confused or bewildered by the heartbreaking events that were to transpire. They were to proceed by faith, resting on the precious promise that "later" they would comprehend His wise purposes. May we proceed with the same faith through life, trusting God who 'works for the good of those who love him.' (Romans 8:28).

Pray: thanking God for his work in our life.

Reflect: do I trust God even in the difficult times?

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (v.27)

When Australian pastor H. B. Macartney visited Hudson Taylor in China, he was amazed at the missionary's serenity in spite of his many burdens and busy schedule. Macartney finally mustered up the courage to say, "You are occupied with millions, I with tens. Your letters are pressingly important, mine of comparatively little value. Yet I am worried and distressed while you are always calm. Tell me, what makes the difference?"

Taylor replied, "I could not possibly get through the work I have to do without the peace of God which passes all understanding keeping my heart and mind."

Macartney later wrote, "He was in God all the time, and God was in him. It was the true abiding spoken of in John 15."

Taylor had learned what it was to abide in Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to abide in him. He didn't allow the pressures and struggles of the world to impact his life. He looked up, trusted God and carried on. We so often get troubled and anxious by the world around us and all the happenings that go on in our lives. We get tense when things don't go according to plan. We get worried when things don't work out the way we expected. We get fearful when we can't control situations. Jesus comes and says '*Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*'

Jesus reminds his disciples here in John 14 that he is about to leave them, but as he leaves them he will send his Holy Spirit on them. The Holy Spirit is our counsellor and guide. He will lead us through life if we but let him. Jesus says I'm leaving peace with you. Trust me. Look to me. Don't look at the troubles around you – I can deal with them. '*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.*'

Pray: asking God to help us trust in him even in difficult times.

Reflect: do I look to Jesus or struggle on my own?

My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. (v.12)

Mr. Sam Rayburn was Speaker of the United States House of Representatives longer than any other man in our history. There is a story about him that reveals the kind of man he really was.

The teenage daughter of a friend of his died suddenly one night. Early the next morning the man heard a knock on his door, and, when he opened it, there was Mr. Rayburn standing outside. The Speaker said, "I just came by to see what I could do to help."

The father replied in his deep grief, "I don't think there is anything you can do, Mr. Speaker. We are making all the arrangements." "Well," Mr. Rayburn said, "have you had your coffee this morning?" The man replied that they had not taken time for breakfast. So Mr. Rayburn said that he could at least make coffee for them. While he was working in the kitchen, the man came in and said, "Mr. Speaker, I thought you were supposed to be having breakfast at the White House this morning." "Well, I was," Mr. Rayburn said, "but I called the President and told him I had a friend who was in trouble, and I couldn't come."

Friendship is a rare and beautiful thing. Especially when that friendship allows us to do whatever it takes to help our friends. Jesus speaks of that in John 15. He gives a command to his disciples that they are to love one another. And then he explains that real love shows itself when one is willing to lay aside their own concerns and needs and desires to help another. In fact his words in verse 13 are '*greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*'

Now rarely in life will we have to lay down our lives for our friends like Jesus did on the cross, but regularly we have opportunities to stop what we are doing in order to help a friend in need. Is this something you do? What kind of friend are you?

Pray: for a friend who needs the Lord's touch on their life today.

Reflect: what can I do to help a friend today?

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement. (v.8)

A hundred years ago an old preacher told of a man in great distress who came to see him at an evangelistic meeting. He was under deep conviction and was frantic with the terror of a conscience that was continually condemning him. He was also very angry with D.L. Moody who had preached the week before, and with the preacher himself. "I wish you and Moody had never come to this city!" he shouted. "Before you came, I wasn't troubled about my sins. You talk of peace and joy, but you have turned my soul into a living hell. I can't stay away from the meetings, and to come to them only makes me worse. You promise salvation, but all I find is torment. I wish you would leave, then I'd get back my old peace."

Now of course the truth is the only way for this man to find true and lasting peace would be to trust in Jesus. This man is like many in the world today. God's Holy Spirit is at work convicting them of sin and they are troubled and not at peace. Jesus said in John 16:8 that the Spirit would come and one of his many tasks is to convict of sin. Without conviction of sin we have no way of knowing that we have done anything wrong. That's why Jesus first came into the world. We had got so far removed from God and his ways that we had no idea how bad our sin was. Jesus came to shine light into the darkness of our world and show us the way out. Now ultimately Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sin.

Jesus promised that when he left this world he would send the Holy Spirit who would be our comforter, counsellor and even convicter. The next time you feel a prick in your mind about something you have thought, said or done, respond to it. Come before God confessing your sin and asking for his forgiveness. He has promised in his word to forgive us and to restore (1 John 1:9). Don't run from it...for the Holy Spirit will continue to challenge and convict.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for sin in your life.

Reflect: do I respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting or ignore him?

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. (v.15)

In one particular tribe in India, it was the custom that on a boy's thirteenth birthday he had to spend the night on his own in the depths of the jungle. This was the tribe's rite of passage from boyhood: pass this test and you had proved that you were a true man. The fateful night came for one young man. Every sound made him jump; every animal cry caused him to tremble, and more than once he thought about giving up and making his way back to the safety of his village. But he stayed, and gradually through the thick tangle of trees the first rays of light began to herald the coming of the morning.

As the light grew stronger and the young began to make out the shapes around him, he was astonished to see the figure of his father, not far away, a gun by his side. All night long he had been there keeping guard, watching over his son to make sure that no harm befell him. And the son thought to himself, "If only I had known that my father was there, I wouldn't have been frightened at all!"

There is a sense to which in life we should not worry about what goes on around us either for we are safe in the protection of our Lord. The psalmist knew that time and again as he calls in the Psalms '*The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock in whom I take refuge.*' Psalm 18:2. And Jesus has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. In fact he sent his Holy Spirit to be our shelter and guide. In John 17 Jesus prays for himself, his disciples and all believers. He prays much for them. But one thing in particular he asks is that God would protect them from the evil one. He knows we will face much in this world and he calls for his father to look after us.

Friend, do not be afraid of what this world throws at you: your Father in heaven is watching over you.

Pray: thanking God for being our shield and defender.

Reflect: do I trust in God's shelter and protection?

“What is truth?” Pilate asked. (v.38)

Some years ago when the Dick Cavett Show was popular in America, the Archbishop of Canterbury was speaking with actress Jane Fonda on that talk show. The Archbishop said, “Jesus is the Son of God, you know.” Fonda replied, “Maybe he is for you, but he’s not for me.” To which the Archbishop profoundly answered, “Well either he is or he isn’t.”

Sadly for many in our world today truth is no longer concrete and can be nailed down. Truth is whatever you as an individual want it to be. What is true for one person is not for another. Or so they believe.

Abraham Lincoln once used a very clever ploy to teach some people about truth. They had come to him with a decision that was based on suppositions rather than truth. After hearing their logic, Lincoln asked, “How many legs would a sheep have if you called its tail a leg?” They quickly answered, “Five!” The President then said, “No, it would only have four legs. Calling a tail a leg doesn’t make it one.”

People struggle with truth. Go back to Jesus’ day and we find Pilate here in John 18 ask the question “what is truth?” It appears he was not that interested in the answer either for he goes out and says to the crowd that he can find no charge against Jesus and can he release him. The crowd of course respond that he should be crucified. Why does Pilate ask the question about truth? Because he is interested in the statement Jesus had made previously. Jesus said in verse 37 that he had come to testify to the truth. He had previously said *‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.’* John 14:6. Sadly Pilate did not listen further to Jesus.

People do not like truth because it shows them up for what they are – sinners. May we not be like them. May we see the truth and may the truth set us free.

Pray: thanking God for Jesus: the way, the truth and the life.

Reflect: how can I help others know the truth?

It is finished. (v.30)

In 1981 Bill Broadhurst entered the Pepsi Challenge 10,000 metre road race in Omaha, Nebraska. Ten years earlier, surgery for a brain aneurysm left him paralysed on his left side. But on a misty July morning, he stood with 1,200 lithe-looking men and women at the starting line. The gun cracked. The crowd surged ahead. Bill threw his stiff left leg forward and pivoted on it as his right foot hit the ground. His slow plop-plop-plop rhythm seemed to mock him as the pack disappeared into the distance. Sweat rolled down his face, pain pierced his ankle, but he kept going. Six miles, two hours, and twenty-nine minutes later, Bill reached the finish line.

A man approached from a small group of bystanders. Bill recognised him from pictures in the newspaper. “Here,” the man said. “You’ve worked harder for this than I have.” With those words, Bill Rodgers, the famous marathon runner, put his newly won medal around Broadhurst’s neck, proclaiming him a winner.

The sight of Jesus hanging “helpless” on a cross looked like a tragic defeat. Almost dead it looked as if his enemies had won. But three little words from His lips amounted to a victory shout: *‘It is finished!’* Three days later the truth of His words would be known. The empty tomb confirmed His claim. He had finished His work by defeating death and atoning for sin. What looked like defeat from a human perspective turned out to be the greatest victory ever for humanity. Jesus died in our place. Now our sins are forgiven.

We do not have to run a race and win – Jesus has already won. We have to run a race and be faithful to endure to the end. When we run through life living for Jesus, serving him and bringing honour to his name, then we will win the price – the crown of righteousness which Paul speaks of in 2 Timothy 4.

Pray: thanking God that Jesus has won the victory.

Reflect: do I rest secure in Jesus’ final words *‘it is finished’*?

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (v.31)

When Elizabeth Barrett became the wife of Robert Browning, her parents disowned her because they disapproved of the marriage. The daughter, however, wrote almost every week, telling them that she loved them and longed for reconciliation. After 10 years she received a huge box in the mail that contained all the notes she had sent. Not one had been opened! Although these “love letters” have become an invaluable part of classical English literature, it’s really pathetic to think that they were never read by Elizabeth Barrett’s parents. Had they looked at just one, the broken relationship with their daughter might have been healed.

God has written a “love letter” for us his people. It’s called the Bible. The bible recalls for us God’s perfect creation and then how we mucked it up with our sin and selfishness. It tells of our attempts to atone for sin with sacrifices on the altar, and then of God’s provision of the perfect Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. It is made up of many books which unite together to give us the full picture of God’s redemptive plan.

One of those books is the gospel of John which we come to the final chapter of today. John has spoken of the life and death of Jesus. John began in chapter 2 by giving us the miracle at the wedding in Cana and explaining this was the first of many signs Jesus gave of who he was. John’s desire in writing his gospel was that we might believe in Jesus and through believing in him inherit eternal life.

As you have read John’s gospel have you been amazed once more at the lengths God would go to save us? He allowed his son to leave behind the glories of heaven to take on human flesh – *‘the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.’* Jesus lived life on earth without sin pointing us back to the Father in heaven, and then he died in our place on the cross. John recorded this that we might believe.

Pray: thanking God for His word.

Reflect: do I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

Then he said to him, "Follow me!" (v.19)

There was a certain man who had been faithful in worshiping with other believers for many years. Then he became lax and stopped coming to the services. The pastor was burdened for his spiritual welfare, so one day he called in his home. The man invited him in and offered him a chair by the fire. The Pastor mentioned to the man how much he missed seeing him in the worship services. The man replied that he was saved and saw no need to go to church. He felt that he could worship just fine at home.

For several long moments they sat in silence and watched the burning embers. Then, taking the tongs, the pastor removed a hot coal and laid it by itself on the hearthstone. As it began to cool, its red glow soon faded. The man, who had been expecting a verbal rebuke, quickly caught the message. He was at church for the next service!

Jesus often uses simple everyday things to illustrate talks and to teach. He uses the simple occasion of breakfast on the beach to remind Peter what he was called to do. As Peter stands around the fire, a charcoal fire, his mind will have drifted back to the last charcoal fire he was stood around – in the courtyard when he denied knowing Jesus. He has let Jesus down, yet here Jesus welcomes him back into the fold. He restores him before then re-commissioning him.

As Jesus gives Peter his commission to go and look after the lambs and sheep we get a picture of what we are called to do as well. We are called to feed the lambs. Baby Christians need help in reading Scripture and understanding it. We are called to take care of the sheep and feed the sheep. The more mature Christian needs help too. We are to look for one another, care for one another, and spur one another on in the Christian faith. We do all of this as we follow Jesus. That is the last point Jesus leaves with Peter – he says in verse 19 *'follow me'*. As we follow Jesus we are to encourage others to do likewise.

Pray: asking God for strength and courage to follow Jesus faithfully.

Reflect: do I look out for others and point them to Jesus?

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (v.8)

Missionary Keith Gustafson was forced to leave the Congo because of the civil war that erupted in 1997. He reported that as the fighting spread, people in the remote area where he lived knew that soldiers were approaching because of the message of the drums. Down the trails and along the riverbanks came the chilling drumbeat that warned of danger.

The drums of the Congo are also used to alert the tribes when there's been a death, to announce a birth, or to call a meeting. They serve as a general news alert; a messenger follows up with additional information.

We are called to be the jungle drums for the gospel. We have the opportunity to deliver a news alert to the people with whom we come in contact every day. Our manner of speech and our moral standards can help prepare the way to share the gospel. We can follow up our general testimony with the specific message of the gospel.

As we begin Acts we discover Jesus commissioning his disciples to go into all the world and be witnesses for him. They are to go and tell others about Jesus: all they have seen, witnessed and heard. They have the good news of the gospel: Jesus saves sinners. And they are called to go. And notice they have to go both near and far. They are to begin at home, around the place they live, work and socialise. We have that same task to do at home as well. Then they were called to go out from there to the surrounding area before moving out further into all the world.

Friends, we have that same call to be Jesus' witnesses. He has given us the same power to do it in as well – the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's stop leaving it to others, and may we in our everyday lives and conversations tell others about Jesus.

Pray: asking God for an opportunity to share the gospel today.

Reflect: do I accept the call to be Jesus' witness here on earth?

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. (v.46)

In 1773 the young pastor of a poor church in Wainsgate, England, was called to a large and influential church in London. John Fawcett was a powerful preacher and writer, and these skills had brought him this opportunity. But as the wagons were being loaded with the Fawcetts' few belongings, their people came for a tearful farewell. During the good-byes, Mary Fawcett cried, "John, I cannot bear to leave!" "Nor can I," he replied. "We shall remain here with our people." The wagons were unloaded, and John Fawcett spent his entire fifty-four-year ministry in Wainsgate. Out of that experience, Fawcett wrote the beautiful hymn, "Blest Be the Tie that Binds."

A church ought to be a wonderful place to be. The love of family in that place should be so strong people will not want to leave. They will love one another, care for one another, learn from one another, and grow with one another. That is certainly the picture we get in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit has come down on the believers and Peter, filled with the Spirit, has preached the sermon of his life. 3,000 were converted and baptised that day. The church was birthed.

And that early church is pictured in these few verses at the end of Acts 2 in a number of ways. It is a learning church as they listened to and applied the apostles' teaching. It was a fellowshiping church, devoted to being together. It was a praying church, not simply praying occasionally but devoted to prayer. It was a reverent church – the word awe has the meaning of fear for God; they were lost in wonder at God's work before their very eyes. It was a sharing church where everything was held in common and the needy were helped. It was a worshipping church who met together often to praise God. It was a happy church filled with those with glad and sincere hearts. It was an attractive and growing church. Is our church characterised like this?

Pray: thanking God for your church family.

Reflect: in what ways is our church like the Acts 2 church?

Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God. (v.8)

John Stott tells of an English Salvation Army drummer who was beating his drum so hard that the band leader had to tell him to pipe down a bit and not make so much noise. In his cockney accent the drummer replied, “God bless you, sir, since oi’ve been converted, oi’m so ’appy, oi could bust the bloomin’ drum!”

Isn’t that a great picture of what it is like when we first hear the gospel and respond in faith? We are saved and redeemed and that should make us happy. And that excitement and joy is contagious. Others notice it and ask why you are so happy. Others see it and want to have it as well.

And that is the case here in Acts 3. Peter and John come across a lame man on their way to the temple. He is begging and asking for alms, asking for money to survive. Though Peter and John did not have what the crippled man at the temple gate was looking for, they certainly had what he needed. This man is healed in the mighty name of Jesus and Peter takes him by the hand and helps him to his feet. And look what the man does – he goes into the temple walking and jumping and praising God. He is so happy that at last he can walk as a normal human being; so happy that he will be able to get about on his own without having to be lifted or to shuffle along on his bottom.

And people notice his joy and are filled with wonder and amazement. And that leads to Peter getting an opportunity to share the gospel message with them. In the second half of the chapter we see Peter point the crowd to Jesus. He speaks of Jesus’ death and resurrection and encourages the people to repent of their sin and turn to the Saviour.

Let’s be a happy people recognising that we are a saved people. And let’s pray for opportunities to share the reason for this joy with others.

Pray: thanking God for the joy of your salvation.

Reflect: am I a happy, joyful Christian?

For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. (v.20)

During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad.

These students were willing to stand up for their faith in the face of persecution. How would you and I respond? In Acts 4 we discover Peter and John being imprisoned and then questioned by the Sadducees. The Sadducees were particularly offended by teaching about the resurrection, which they denied. The ruler's question to Peter and John is crucial (v.7). Certain that they acted on God's behalf and spoke with His authority, they couldn't imagine what power Peter and John might be drawing upon.

Considering that this same court convicted Jesus just weeks earlier, Peter's boldness is unbelievable. Although already indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he was given a special filling at this point. Recall Jesus' own promise: *'When you are brought before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.'* (Luke 12:11-12).

The court realised they couldn't do anything to the men so they sent them off with a warning not to speak any more about Jesus. Their response was simple: we can't help but speak of all we have seen and heard. May we have the courage to keep speaking of all we know about Jesus.

Pray: asking God for courage to keep proclaiming Jesus.

Reflect: do I speak of Jesus and His work in my life?

You have not lied to men but to God. (v.4)

D L Moody tells of a remarkable picture that was exhibited some years ago in London. As you looked at it from a distance, you seemed to see a monk engaged in prayer, his hands clasped, his head bowed. As you came nearer, however, and examined the painting more closely, you saw that in reality he was squeezing a lemon into a punch bowl!

What a picture that is of the human heart! Superficially examined, everything looks good and noble and pleasing and right but on closer examination all is not as it seems. And sadly that is the case for many in the church. Many proclaim to be Christians and come to church and read the Bible and sing the songs and listen to the message but then they leave the church and their lives are lived in a completely different way. The church is full of hypocrites.

That is seen very clearly today in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira. On the face of it they appear to be good Christian folks. We have just read in the end of chapter 4 about all the believers being of one heart and mind. They shared everything and from time to time sold land and property and brought the money to help the needy. This couple have sold a piece of property and are bringing the proceeds to the church leaders. However, they decide not to give it all but to keep some back for themselves. This isn't a problem for it is their own property and they can do as they want. The trouble is they clearly pretend they are bringing the whole amount to the apostles. Peter is prompted by the Spirit and challenges them both individually. They lie about this being the price they received for the land. And this lie and hypocrisy leads to their destruction.

God is passionate about his church. He longs for it to be pure and holy. He longs for it to stand as a beacon in the land. He wants it to shine light into a dark world. He wants it to stand against sin and to root out sin. Let us examine our lives, confess our sin and turn from it, and live fully for Jesus.

Pray: asking God to forgive our sin.

Reflect: examine your heart and confess any sin you come across.

Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. (v.3)

A great method for getting the right minister to help a church grow is contained in 'The Ultimate Chain Letter' for parishes: If you are unhappy with your vicar, simply have your parish secretary send a copy of this letter to six other churches who are tired of their vicar. Then bundle up your vicar and send him to the church on the top of the list in this latter. Within a week you will receive 16,435 vicars and one of them should be all right. Have faith in this chain letter for vicars. Do not break the chain. One church did and they got their old vicar back.

We smile and laugh at this but it is amazing what methods people use to choose good leaders. Here in Acts 6 we find a far better method. The church was growing and there were growing pains. There were grumbles and murmurings of complaint. And it was all over food distribution to the widows. The apostles were struggling to do all they had to do. It happens in church life. The minister can't do it all.

So the apostles decided that in order to concentrate on that which they were called for – namely prayer and the ministry of the Word – they would appoint others to serve alongside them and deal with the practical ministries within the early church. They chose seven men to be in effect deacons. Notice their method of choosing – verse 3 '*Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.*' They were not simply to choose people because they knew them, or they looked good, or they had good jobs, or for whatever character quality they saw from a human perspective. They were to choose godly men with godly characteristics.

Whenever we come to choose deacons in the church, our first port of call should be to pray to God asking for his leading, and then we should look for those who are full of the Spirit and wisdom.

Pray: for the church leaders – pastor and deacons.

Reflect: do I choose leaders based on godly characteristics?

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (v.55)

When Martin Luther was summoned to the Diet of Worms in 1521 to answer charges of heresy, he thought he would be allowed to defend his biblical views. To his dismay, he was given no opportunity to defend his beliefs. Instead, he was ordered to recant. Luther asked for a day to think about his decision, which he knew could mean his life. He prayed for courage, then came back the next day and made his stand on the truth of Scripture. On his way back to Wittenberg, Luther was “kidnapped” by friends and taken into safe hiding.

There are times when we must take a stand - perhaps a difficult but necessary one. That was true for Luther, and in today’s reading for Stephen as well. Stephen made a lengthy defence. His message is, in fact, the longest recorded sermon in Acts. But, unlike Luther, Stephen did not escape his persecutors.

Stephen was charged with speaking against Moses, against God, against the temple, and against the law and the customs handed down by Moses. While overall his message shows the charges to be false, it is more a sermon that traces God’s historical dealings with Israel, Israel’s history of rebellion against God, and a climax that indicts his hearers of the very charges that they were bringing against him. They were guilty of rejecting Moses and the law, and even worse, they had just killed the Righteous One whom God had sent for their salvation. Stephen spoke boldly in spite of the inherent danger before him. The religious leaders did not like what they heard. Stephen was given a vision of heaven before him which must have encouraged his heart as he was led out to be stoned to death – with a certain Saul of Tarsus watching and giving his approval!

Hopefully we will not face the same persecution Stephen faced, but may we have the strength and courage to boldly defend our faith and share the gospel.

Pray: for boldness to share the gospel today.

Reflect: would I stand strong in the face of persecution?

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. (v.35)

After listening to a sermon one Sunday, Queen Victoria wondered if she could be absolutely sure that she was saved. Unfortunately, her chaplain couldn't give her such assurance. This became known to a commoner named John Townsend. After much prayer and consideration, Townsend wrote a letter in which he urged the Queen to read John 3:16 and Romans 10:9-10. A few weeks later, he received a reply from Her Majesty confirming the assurance that she'd received from God's Word.

Centuries before, the Lord also used another humble servant to bring salvation to another high-ranking official. Philip was a great servant of the Lord and was being used mightily with the crowds in Samaria. God also took him away from the crowds to meet one man and spend time sharing the gospel with him. An angel of the Lord came to Philip we read in verse 26 and directed him on to the Gaza road. The first important thing to note is Philip being open to the Lord's leading and guiding. How many times do we hear from the Lord and try and argue it away as not for us and not for now? How many times do we ignore God's prompting and stay comfortably where we are? Philip hears from God and goes. He is obedient.

His obedience leads him to go along side this chariot with the Ethiopian official. He hears him reading and asks if he understands. A conversation begins and Philip is able to use the Scriptures to share the gospel. The eunuch is converted and baptised there and then.

God can and does do wonderful things in our midst. He looks for us to be attentive to his leading, obedient to his prompting and faithful and bold in our witnessing. All Philip needed to do was follow God's prompting and then use the Bible to lead their discussion. We can do the same.

Pray: for God to help us be attentive to his leading and guiding.

Reflect: how can I use the Bible to share the gospel with someone else?

Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. (v.13)

Ulysses S. Grant's first command in the Civil War was over a regiment of Illinois volunteers. As he led his troops into battle against the Confederates in northern Missouri, Grant reflected later: "My heart kept getting higher and higher until it felt to me as though it was in my throat. I would have given anything then to have been back in Illinois." But then the thought occurred to him that the enemy had as much reason to fear him as he had to fear the enemy. Buoyed by his new insight, Grant laid aside his fears and went forward into the battle.

Ananias of Damascus wished he could have stayed home the day he heard God's voice calling him into "battle." This otherwise unknown disciple is usually remembered for his hesitation to obey God's instructions concerning Saul. Ananias didn't have advance knowledge that Saul was no longer an enemy to be feared, but a brother to be embraced. This is not an excuse for Ananias' reluctance to obey, but his objections show him to be thoroughly human. Saul's reputation as a persecutor of the saints had preceded him. Evidently Ananias had heard that Saul was coming to Damascus, and he wanted nothing to do with this Jewish zealot.

God then gave more details to Ananias about this man who was going to be his chosen instrument before the Gentiles. And notice he gives Ananias the command to go a second time. This time he listens and obeys. Ananias left his house and headed for Straight Street. I'm guessing he probably went with just a little fear and trepidation. He had no idea how Saul would respond. Yet he knew God was sending him and that was all he needed.

God calls for us to go and be his witnesses in the world today. He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. He has sent his Spirit to go with us. We have nothing to fear as we go in his strength and with his power.

Pray: for courage to go and be obedient to God's call.

Reflect: do I answer God's call to be his witness or do I make my excuses to remain at home?

I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but God accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. (v.34)

A number of years ago, on a Sunday morning, members of First Church in Kingston, Oklahoma, noticed a shabbily dressed, bearded man wandering near the church, poking in garbage cans. The man finally came to rest on the church steps. His trousers were worn, his cap and coat dirty, and his shoes old. A few members commented about “that old bum.” The morning service started, and after the special music the members were surprised to see the “old bum” wander in the door and start down the aisle. Someone whispered, “Look there, that old guy’s come inside!” Another said, “there he is ... he’s the guy who was sitting on the steps.”

The man walked right up to the front of the church, and walked behind the pulpit. Removing his cap and wig the “old bum” revealed that he was the church’s pastor, the Rev. Bobby Rice, Jr. Rice said only two members approached him in his “bum” disguise. One offered to buy him a meal; another invited him to church. Rice used a similar technique while a member of a church in Texarkana, Arkansas. “Some of the church members there actually pushed me aside as they hurried into church,” he recalled.

We all have many prejudices in life. All over the world people who are Christians and those who are not have prejudices. We do all we can at times to protect ourselves from those we consider to be unclean. Barriers are erected against those of other races, cultures, nationalities, income levels, upbringings, behaviour, etc. etc. The early church was no different in some ways. In today’s reading we see Peter learn from God that all are welcome in his kingdom. For Peter that meant learning that Gentiles were as welcome as Jews. It meant laying aside his prejudices and getting alongside someone different. What barriers do we erect? May we not put up barriers to stop people coming to Jesus.

Pray: for forgiveness for our prejudices and the barriers we erect.

Reflect: what prejudices do I have and show?

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him. (v.2)

We all know William Carey as the founder of the BMS World Mission and indeed the founder of overseas mission in general. We recall his famous words ‘Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.’ However his missionary journey and endeavours almost never happened. When Carey attempted to place before a meeting of Baptist ministers the challenge of missions, he is said to have been rebuked by a senior minister with the words, “Sit down young man! When God chooses to convert the heathen he will do it without your aid or mine!” People sometimes get in the way.

This little poem springs to mind whenever we discuss church problems: To live above, with saints we love, will certainly be glory. To live below with saints we know, well that’s another story!

Acts 11 describes how the church in Jerusalem related to the saints below, to the Gentiles in Caesarea who had trusted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. We get to see their reaction here in these first 18 verses and Peter’s response. The believers in Jerusalem are not happy. They still believe the gospel is for Jews and for those who are circumcised, that is those who have gone through the ritual of becoming like a Jew. They are struggling with the fact Peter went and ate with Cornelius.

Peter takes the time to explain what God taught him and what he witnessed before his eyes. He reminds them of God’s call back in Acts 1:8 to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. The gospel is never meant just for the few. The gospel is for all who will accept it and come to faith in Jesus – regardless of race, gender, social standing.

Our call is to go and make disciples of all nations. Stop making excuses and building barriers.

Pray: for strength to overcome barriers.

Reflect: what barriers do I erect?

When she recognised Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed "Peter is at the door!" (v.14)

Andrew had to do some work on a play called 'Waiting for Godot' last year in preparation for a university interview. It was a strange play. In the play by Samuel Beckett, two characters wait for Godot to arrive. Day after day, they anticipate his coming, and day after day he does not appear. The play ends with frustrated anticipation - they will return the next day, but the audience has the distinct unease that Godot will not show up.

In contrast, our reading today depicts a group who hope for someone to show up, but when he does, they don't believe it's really him!

King Herod realised that his popularity rating went up when he persecuted the followers of Jesus. He had executed James and intended to kill Peter after Passover. In response, *'the church was earnestly praying to God for him'* (v.5). The night before the trial, an angel of God appeared to Peter and miraculously delivered him from Herod's maximum-security prison.

Peter first thought he was having a vision; when he was outside the prison walls alone, he realised that his body - not just his mind - had been freed (v.11). He immediately went to the house of Mary, where he knew the church would be gathered to pray. And here is where the surprise comes in. Rhoda the servant girl comes to the door but before she opens it she hears Peter's voice and runs to the others. Comically she knows it is Peter but forgets to open the door. She is so excited by the answer to prayer that she can't wait to tell the others. They don't believe her at first but eventually at Peter's persistent knocking they let him in.

God answered their prayers. And he still answers prayer today. Be persistent in your prayer. Be earnest in your prayer. And look for God's answers – and give him thanks and praise.

Pray: giving God thanks for recent answered prayer in your life.

Reflect: do I believe God answers prayer today?

Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.
(v.2)

At the age of 22, Franklin Graham was drinking, partying, and smoking marijuana and had been expelled from a Christian school and college. His father, Billy Graham, confronted him, “I want you to know that your mother and I sense there is a struggle for the soul of your life, and you’re going to have to make a choice.” After re-reading the Gospel of John, Franklin committed his life to Christ. Today he heads Samaritan’s Purse, an international relief organisation, as well as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Thankfully, a slow start to our spiritual journey doesn’t end the story. Saul of Tarsus spent many years rejecting Jesus and persecuting Christians before he was saved and transformed. After meeting the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he spent some time in Jerusalem and then spent a year in Antioch with Barnabas teaching the new believers there. It is time for the Paul we know to start his missionary work. The old has gone and the new is in evidence.

Here in Acts 13 we find the church leaders in Antioch praying and fasting. They are seeking the Lord’s will for their lives and for the ministry of the gospel. This is the best place for a church to start – prayer and fasting, seeking God’s face. And as they pray the Holy Spirit comes and says ‘*set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*’ Not only are they praying for the Lord’s will to be revealed, but they are obedient when it comes. They pray for Saul and Barnabas and then send them on their way. These men spent many years travelling around preaching the gospel and seeing souls saved.

God can use us as well if we are willing and able to follow him and be obedient to his call on our lives. Let’s be sure to pray and ask him to show us where and how he wants us to serve him.

Pray: asking God to show you where he wants you to serve him.

Reflect: am I willing to do what God calls me to do?

...where they continued to preach the gospel. (v.7)

Early in his life, Scotsman Robert Morrison, great missionary, set his heart on going to China. He studied Chinese in London and in 1807 he came to New York to get a ship to China. No one wanted to take him. He couldn't find a ship. He couldn't get there. Foreigners were not allowed in China. But he finally by some means was able to get passage and arrive in China and he had to live hiding out for six months in a French warehouse on the docks of Canton. He learned to cook Chinese food, dress in Chinese clothes. He studied the difficult Cantonese language.

Preaching was illegal but he gathered a group of people and behind closed doors, met with them and there were never more than ten people but he met with them. Seven years after coming, he baptised his first convert, seven years. Finally, he finished the Book of Acts in Cantonese and succeeded in having it printed but an argument arose among the Christian craftsmen who chipped out the wooden blocks for each page and the authorities heard about the argument and Morrison was forbidden from preaching and printing anything at all and all of his effort was halted.

Persistent and undaunted, his biographer says, he stayed on the job feeling God was in it. He mastered the Cantonese language and translated the entire Bible into Cantonese. He completed a six volume Chinese-English dictionary to train missionaries and every missionary that ever went to China is indebted to one man's persistence.

Paul and Barnabas set the example for us in regard to persistence in mission work. They shared so well in Iconium but the Jews didn't like their message and stirred up trouble. Undaunted they moved on to Lystra and shared the gospel and healed a lame man. Before long the folks from Antioch and Iconium came down to stir up trouble there as well. Despite this they moved on and carried on sharing the gospel. The challenge for us is to be as persistent in serving the Lord and sharing the gospel.

Pray: asking God for courage to keep sharing the gospel.

Reflect: do I give up easily or do I persevere?

We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are. (v.11)

We all know William Carey as the founder of the BMS World Mission and indeed the founder of overseas mission in general. We recall his famous words ‘Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.’ However his missionary journey and endeavours almost never happened. When Carey attempted to place before a meeting of Baptist ministers the challenge of missions, he is said to have been rebuked by a senior minister with the words, “Sit down young man! When God chooses to convert the heathen he will do it without your aid or mine!” People sometimes get in the way. Well intentioned people sometimes cannot see open doors and opportunities before them. Carey found this...and Paul and his companions found something similar here in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas wanted to carry on their mission to the Gentiles but a group of believers were getting in the way and trying to lay down extra requirements.

At stake was the status of Gentile believers - hardly a new issue, but one that was still not settled permanently. The men from Judea who showed up in Antioch insisting that Gentiles be circumcised were believing Pharisees still clinging to the Law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas challenged them because they knew that God had justified the Gentiles by faith apart from the Law, just as He had done with the Jews. Therefore, Gentile Christians were not second-class kingdom citizens.

In his speech to the council (v.7-11), Peter acknowledged the same truth. The generally accepted date of this council, 49 A.D., means that about ten years had elapsed since Peter’s ministry to Cornelius. But the apostle had not forgotten what God had taught him. The problem with circumcision, as Paul later wrote to the Galatians (Galatians 5:2-3), was that accepting circumcision obligated the person to keep the whole Law. Not even the Jews had done that perfectly (Acts 15:10). Let’s not be a people who put unrealistic and unreasonable expectations on people in order to be part of the church.

Pray: asking God to help us have a spirit of unity in the church.

Reflect: do I erect unreasonable barriers for people coming into church?

Where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. (v.1)

John Wesley is renowned as a great evangelist. Charles Wesley, his brother, also preached the gospel and penned numerous hymns, including “And Can It Be” and “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” But their significant Christian contributions should be considered in light of the influence of their mother, Susanna Wesley. Mother of 19 children, she endeavoured to teach her sons and daughters Greek and Latin and instruct them in the faith. One biographer said, “John Wesley and Charles Wesley, as children consciously or unconsciously will, applied the example and teachings and circumstances of their home life.”

The godly impact of parents and grandparents can be seen in the life of Timothy. This preacher and missionary was valuable in the spread of the gospel and the growth of the early church. He was dearly loved by the apostle Paul and considered indispensable in ministry (Philippians 2:22). Scripture takes care to note that Timothy inherited a rich legacy of faith that helped to prepare him for his calling.

First, Timothy chose to follow God as a young man. His father was not a believer, and his mother Eunice was (v.1). At some point prior to meeting Paul, Timothy had already decided that he would embrace the faith of his mother, and his reputation among the believers testified to his commitment. Second, Timothy demonstrated his faith through his obedience. To remove any distraction from their ministry, Paul circumcised his son in the faith, and Timothy complied. He left his home in Lystra to accompany Paul and Silas, and God blessed their work with new believers coming to Christ daily.

The encouragement for us is to share the gospel with our children from a young age and set them the right example in life.

Pray: for our children that they would come to know and love the Saviour.

Reflect: do I set the right example for children to look up to?

Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. (v.23)

In August 2004, thousands of spectators converged upon Athens to watch 11,099 athletes compete in the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad. Visitors and athletes alike delighted in such famous sights as the Parthenon and the Agora. Yet one ancient visitor had a much different reaction to this city. Instead of relaxing, he was agitated. Instead of beautiful buildings, he saw countless idols. His heart burned that the Lord God was denied His rightful praise and glory.

Paul caught people's attention as he preached the gospel. These philosophers thought he was babbling and disputed with him. Before long they took him before the Areopagus to hear him further. As he stood there he used the altar to the unknown God as a way to start and turn the conversation to God. First, he proclaimed that God could indeed be known through the visible display of His creation. Moreover, He created all humanity and directed the course of human history (v.26). The correct response to the true God wasn't temples and idols, but repentance (v.30). Although God had been patient, He would not allow the sin of idolatry to go unpunished forever.

It seems that Paul intended to say more, but was cut off by the crowd when he mentioned resurrection. Epicureans denied any possibility of resurrection, and others thought that bodily resurrection was abhorrent. Some have criticised Paul's speech because it lacks references to Scripture or Jesus. Yet this was a thoroughly pagan crowd. He had to begin by establishing the existence of the One God. Moreover, he must have talked about the Cross at some point because he talked about the Resurrection. In any event, at least two people repented and received Christ as a result.

Look out for opportunities that present themselves for sharing the gospel and use examples around you to begin talking of Jesus.

Pray: for an opportunity to share the gospel today.

Reflect: do I use the openings that come my way to share the gospel?

Paul went to see them and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. (v.2, 3)

The great leader and educator Booker T. Washington told about the “entrance exam” he had to pass to enter the Hampton Institute in Virginia. The head teacher ordered the young Washington to sweep the classroom. He knew she wanted to see how hard he was willing to work, so he swept the room three times. He also dusted the furniture four times, until the teacher couldn’t find a speck of dust anywhere in the room. Washington was admitted to Hampton, and later said his years there were a turning point. He also said it was the best exam he ever passed.

The apostle Paul was also willing to work hard to gain an important entry. Paul was seeking to work for the gospel rather than an education, but the results of his hard work were the same as they were for Booker T. Washington. Paul’s work ethic helped prove his credibility in the sin-hardened city of Corinth, and the church was established there.

Paul supported himself by his trade of tentmaking when he first came to Corinth, preaching the gospel on the Sabbath. People saw him as a hard worker during the week as he made tents and then on the Sabbath they allowed him to speak in the synagogue. They were willing to listen to him because they had seen his commitment in working first. Later Silas and Timothy joined him and he was able to commit more of his time to preaching and teaching.

Sometimes we want to get involved in the up front ministry in church without putting in the time serving faithfully in the background first. Paul set the example for us of working hard to earn the opportunity for public ministry. Is there any job in the church you are not willing to do? Ask yourself why that is. Roll up your sleeves and get involved in simple background tasks in order to serve others.

Pray: asking God to help you faithfully serve him.

Reflect: am I happy serving in the background?

In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (v.20)

The story is told of the shoplifter who wrote to a department store and said, "I've just become a Christian, and I can't sleep at night because I feel guilty. So here's £100 that I owe you." Then he signed his name, and in a little postscript at the bottom he added, "If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest."

Many of us like to hang on to parts of our old life. We happily say we are crowning Jesus as Lord but in actual fact we only allow him to be Lord of part of our lives – normally the part that has to do with church attendance on a Sunday. We like to hang on to the 'good' bits and the parts that give us personal pleasure. The call though when we come to saving faith in Jesus is to leave it all behind.

And that is the example we see in Acts 19. Paul has been preaching in the hall of Tyrannus for two years now. Many have heard the gospel message. Not only that but they have witnessed some great miracles before their eyes. One day some Jews went around trying to cast out demons, presumably thinking that anything Paul could do they could do too. How wrong they were. They were beaten by a man possessed by an evil spirit. This soon became news around the area and many were seized with fear. We read in verse 18 that they believed and then they came and openly confessed their evil deeds. Those who practiced sorcery burned their evil scrolls. These had cost them a fortune but they were leaving the old behind in order to completely live for Jesus. The witness that came from this was incredible – *'the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.'*

We must put to death the old life, we must turn from the deeds of our past that kept us from living God's way. And we have to keep doing that. Even as mature Christians there are things that creep into our lives that we need to let go of.

Pray: asking God to help you turn fully from the old worldly pleasures that you keep holding on to.

Reflect: what do I need to let go of?

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. (v.24)

John Stott, the great British evangelical of our generation passed from earthly life to heavenly glory in 2011. He was well known in evangelical circles for his bible teaching at All Souls London, and across the globe through the Langham Partnership, and also through the many books he wrote. Preparing to say farewell he wrote his last book in 2010 and his parting words were ‘As I lay down my pen for the last time (literally since I confess I am not computerised) at the age of eighty-eight, I venture to send this valedictory message to my readers.’ He wanted to give one last message based on all his years of experience. It was entitled ‘The Radical Disciple’ and I highly recommend it to you.

Writing about the book Richard Coekin says ‘Like a favourite great-uncle’s legacy, this little collection of farewell messages from a great man of God and radical disciple of Jesus bequeaths to us some precious treasures – warm appeals to distinctive Christ-like maturity, challenging contemporary calls to ecological concern, simplicity and balance, priceless wisdom from an elderly saint about dependence and dying – and all delivered with his customary economy, clarity, and faithfulness to Scripture.’

Stott wanted to say farewell and leave a farewell message. He leaves much more as a legacy from a life lived well for Christ his Saviour. Here in Acts 20 we find a farewell from Paul. He knows what is lying in front of him and he knows he will not travel to these parts again. So he says farewell. And as he says his goodbyes he reminds the people that he has one task to complete – testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. Paul has set the people an example in his life as well as in his teaching. Before we leave this earth we have a task to complete as well – living as witnesses for Jesus. We do that with the words we share and also through the life we live.

Pray: asking God to help us faithfully finish the race.

Reflect: how am I doing as a witness for Jesus?

I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. (v.13)

The courage of American Civil War leader Stonewall Jackson in the midst of conflict can be a lesson for the believer. Historian Mark Brimsley wrote,

‘A battlefield is a deadly place, even for generals; and it would be naive to suppose Jackson never felt the animal fear of all beings exposed to wounds and death. But invariably he displayed extraordinary calm under fire, a calm too deep and masterful to be mere pretence. His apparent obliviousness to danger attracted notice, and after the First Manassas battle someone asked him how he managed it. “My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed,” Jackson explained. “God knows the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter where it may overtake me.” He added pointedly, “That is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave.”’

The Apostle Paul knew his life was in God’s hands. Here in Acts 21 he is continuing his journey towards Jerusalem. When they stopped in Tyre the disciples there tried to dissuade Paul from going on to Jerusalem but he kept going. In Caesarea a prophet came and tried using a visual lesson to stop Paul in his tracks. He took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and explained that this was what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem. His friends all tried to stop him from going, but Paul was determined. He wanted to go and finish the task for which he felt called – he wanted to testify to the gospel of God’s grace. He declared to his friends that he was ready to die for the Lord’s name.

Paul knew that very breath was a gift from God. He understood that God had his life planned out for him and only when the Lord was ready to take him home, would he die. We would do well to lay our lives in God’s hands and trust him to keep us safe until his time to call us home. With that mindset we would live life well and bravely until that moment.

Pray: asking God to help us live fully for him.

Reflect: am I ready for the Lord to call me home?