

## Church on the move

### Acts 13:1-12

On the day the Church was born – the Day of Pentecost, there were Jews and God-fearers from all over the known world:

Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs (Acts 2:9-11)

As they returned to their homes, they would have taken the Good News about Jesus with them, and so the Gospel spread.

Then, some time later, there was an outbreak of persecution where Believers scattered around the world again.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Antioch was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the Roman Empire with around 500,000 people. There was a large Jewish district where the Gospel spread and then spilled over into the Gentiles in the city.

In this first wave of evangelism, one book I read this week said that perhaps 1000 people had come to faith.

However many believers there were, it was enough for news of it and of the Gentiles coming to faith, for the Jerusalem Church to decide that it needed to be investigated and helped, and so Barnabas was sent to take charge of what was going on:

News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all

their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:19-24)

After the Apostle Paul came to faith, he had gone briefly to Jerusalem, where he had met Barnabas and Barnabas had taken him to meet the Apostles. He had then returned to his home town of Tarsus (in Turkey) where he had spent the next 7 years.

From his new base in Antioch, Barnabas had remembered Paul and went to bring him to help the Antioch Church:

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26)

Barnabas put together a dream team of leaders for this Church:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. (Acts 13:1)

Let's meet them! (Powerpoint)

Under their leadership, the Church continued to grow over about an 8 year period.

Such a large number of people came to faith that within 300 years, Antioch at one point was known as being almost entirely Christian.

For years now, I have loved reading these verses and have been gripped by the goal of being part of a leadership team like this, with different cultures and backgrounds represented. I dream of what it would be like to have a leadership team like this in Birmingham and what difference it could make to the city.

Question: What do you do with a 'dream Church'?

Answer: You send people.

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The point of the Church is that it is “Apostolic”; it doesn’t just exist because it exists, but it exists for the purpose of fulfilling its purpose – the Great Commission.

Apostolic means “Called or Sent”.

And we, and all Believers are living under the Great Commission – that means that we have orders from Jesus to Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

For many of us, that may not mean travelling any distance, because there are plenty people around us who need to be made into disciples, and, in Birmingham, we are very blessed to have so many nations and cultures around us, which means that we can go to the nations without having to leave our neighbourhood.

But it does mean that we should understand our Calling and identity.

And we can also be apostolic – living under Jesus’ Call, by building and strengthening a sending church where we are; making disciples, making Jesus known; contributing financially and praying.

But for others, it means going – to the next place that needs a church plant or abroad.

So far, the Crown has had 3 elders; Robin Vincent, Dan Crowe and me.

About 5 years ago, we sent Robin to Bromsgrove, where he planted Grace Church, which is still going strong! Robin & his family are soon to be leaving Bromsgrove to plant again into Swansea.

Nearly 2 years ago we sent Dan and his family to Central Asia where they have joined a team working in a city where there are no known followers of Jesus.

And the family of churches we are part of – Newfrontiers, is an apostolic movement – very aware of God’s Call to go.

In the 1970’s it started in a church on the south coast of the UK, led by Terry Virgo, and with no real plans to go much further. Gradually it started to link with churches around the South East and grew steadily around that area, but still with no real plans to extend much beyond this.

Then there was a prophetic picture that someone brought about a bow with its string being drawn back over the UK and as this happened, it gained strength to fire arrows into the nations.

This picture prompted movement that caused several churches to be planted in the Midlands and elsewhere – and that is what formed the strategy to plant into Birmingham, which is where the Crown fits in!

And still, Newfrontiers is planting churches across the UK with real determination (Powerpoint) and is planting churches around the world – currently into over 60 nations

For Paul, there was always going to be a day when God said “I have trained you – now it’s time to go!” – Remember Paul’s specific commission:

[This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. \(Acts 9:15\)](#)

And so, when the first phase of his training had finished, The Holy Spirit spoke and said “Now is the time – set aside Barnabas and Saul.”

My experience is that it is hard being sent from a church – you have invested in people’s lives and have built up strong friendships; you have been through hard stuff with people and have fought and won faith battles together...and then you leave and there is a loss.

And my experience is that it hurts sending people you love and have walked through hard times with, who have meant so much to you and have stood alongside you – then you pray them out, and there’s a gap; and you never feel ready to send them, and you never feel that you can replace them, and you can never afford it!

It is always a faith step – it always trusts God for fruit and provision. But I believe with all my heart that when a church stops looking on to the next thing, then it risks taking its eyes off the Great Commission and risks losing something of its Apostolic Call.

So for us in the Crown, our eyes are fixed on the Nations around us in Birmingham – we will need to be wise in how we cross cultural gaps and the churches that we plant to reach into the nations may look very different.

To reach the nations around us means that some of us will need to work hard to learn different languages and how to relate to different cultures; how to best present the Gospel to Muslims and Sikhs and Hindus.

It will need many of us to step up and do things we don't feel at all comfortable doing – learning to lead; learning to preach; learning to pray for the sick and share our faith.

It means being ready to work hard; to hit lots of difficulties and opposition; to fail lots of times in order to move things on.

Some others of us will be called by God to go overseas; Dan and Lucy's call from God was to go to people who are unreached – who have never heard the Gospel.

Barnabas and Saul were obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit, so they set off, firstly to Cyprus, where Barnabas was from, and then on to Galatia (I'll say more about that next week)

This trip is known as Paul's first missionary journey (maps in the back of most Bibles)

The reason it's significant is that this was the first time that people had set out deliberately to take the Gospel to the Nations – Jews and Gentiles; and we all owe a lot to this, as it opened the way for the Gospel to go to the ends of the Earth – and ultimately to us.

I want to finish with 2 stories that have affected me and planted Apostolic seeds in me.

1. Story of the Moravian missionaries who sold themselves into slavery in order to reach slaves
2. Wedding in Biggin Hill – small chapel with a plaque on the wall saying that in 30 years at the start of the last century, this little church had planted 90 other churches and had sent out lots of evangelists.

We are small, don't have much money & are still feeling the cost of the last people we sent; but the Apostolic Call to Go – our Great Commission needs to be living with us, affecting everything we do.