

It seems a bit ironic to me - you were having a great time last Sunday when David talked you through food and the Bible; you shared communion together as an appropriate response to what he said. And while that was happening, I was lying at home feeling the last thing I want to focus on, taste and smell was food or any talk of it. One could argue the Lord moves in mysterious ways. The positive side of all this is that I lost about 2- 3 kilograms. Trudy said I needn't bother looking for them.

Thank you Robyn and David; thank you Erin and Elizabeth for the inspiring lead you gave to our worship over the last two weeks. A visitor from Christchurch told Trudy this week how much they enjoyed the October 2 gathering – we need to do that more often. And of course we thank musicians, readers, dramatists, welcomers and people on Morning Tea – a lot goes into each Sunday morning here and double the effort when Breakfast Church is on.

On October 2, I went to the Wanaka Baptist Fellowship service. There were 10 there. I met a couple from Adelaide with whom I established a couple of connections fairly quickly – as you do.

Today makes something of a different direction for us as a community, although there have been many changes over the time I've been here, times to look at how and why we do what we do. At the end of our gathering we'll commend Julian and Karene to the new stage in their lives and in our lives as a community.

In the heady days of the early church, it was all action. In Acts 12 Peter was released from prison, again – the people praying for his release were so surprised when their prayers were answered, they didn't believe it was Peter knocking at the door. Be careful when your prayers are answered, you may have difficulties with that answer.

The second thing that happened in Chapter 12 is that King Herod got his comeuppance.... For some strange reason, when I was preparing, I thought of the upcoming American election. Then I thought, back to the text!

So Peter's free and Herod's gone; then at the end of the chapter there's one of those summary statements Luke is famous for, **'But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.'** And spread and flourish it did – without Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, exploding Samsung Note7 phones and Christian Radio and Television. How could that be we wonder!

Christianity literally exploded out from Jerusalem in the century following the first Christian Pentecost. One place where it found a home to settle and grow was Antioch (the ruins of this city are in modern Turkey). The reasons for its decline are interesting. Because of its location then, Antioch became a crucial centre from which Christianity spread in a number of directions.

Acts 13:1-4

Now 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.² 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.'³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

⁴ **The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit....**

And today we stand in the long line of Christian communities who have set apart those to whom the Holy Spirit has spoken about Christian Service. 50 years ago, in 1966, as I was standing by the piano at Nelson Baptist talking to the minister after the evening service, I felt the Lord stirred in me a call to serve Him as a minister through the wise words of the pastor - Cliff Reay.

Looking back 50 years later I see both the hand of God on my life/our lives and the Holy Spirit speaking through him. 40 years ago next month was the Assembly when we were set apart for this ministry.

I want you to note with me several things:

1. The church had prophets and teachers – it's an interesting story as to what happened to the prophets in that context. We have evidence of them among us too. We've been reading Jeremiah recently – the lot of the prophet isn't a happy one but it's a more complex subject than my purpose today. Simply to say we need to listen to the Scriptures, to people who listen carefully to God and to our teachers.
2. The community took seriously the need to pray and fast in order to hear God speak – removing stuff so we can concentrate on listening – for us fasting from media, phones, the internet etc. seems to be necessary in our time. I'm not belittling going without food by the way.
3. The Holy Spirit spoke!
4. The Holy Spirit said – set apart these two for the work to which I've called them
5. They prayed some more and set them free to do that which the Lord had called them to.

And the rest of the Book of Acts and beyond tells the story of how that was fulfilled – quite differently in Paul and Barnabas' lives.

So just to remind you of our situation - a couple of things have changed:

- Martin announced in early April that he and Diane were going to Feilding - according to reports they're doing well.
- It's become clear to me that much and all as I might like to think I'm indispensable, I'm not (to be honest I'm not sure I ever felt I was). Just to check I put my arm in and out of a bucket several times and saw that it really made no difference. So I came to the conclusion that it would be better for the church and for me if I informed the elders that it was time for them and you to look at what's next for Caversham at a ministerial level.

My reading and the wisdom of many other Christian leaders, is that ministerial transitions can be managed in a range of ways – some of which are helpful and some aren't. If the minister is focussed on his future then he goes and that's that. If the focus is on the church and not the minister then the mission of the church is paramount and continuity primary. I've been looking at pastoral transitions around the country – they are interesting and varied. But in this new world continuity is seen to be of great importance. We're really embarking on a journey that this church hasn't been on before. As I look into the records and talk to people it's possible the church in its 143 years has never had a minister retire.

This is new but fortunately people have taken the time to write and reflect on church life in this regard. However we can't sit around waiting and you won't and in the meantime the work of the church goes on. We are to continue the work of Jesus in the world. That's what he's commissioned us to do.

MATTHEW: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

MARK: He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

JOHN: Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

JOHN AGAIN: 'Take care of my sheep.'

LUKE: 'This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

LUKE AGAIN: 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.'

At the same time we need to look at what's happening today. I've just began reading Mark Sayers' book 'Disappearing Church.' It's realistic and hopeful. Realism today; hope later

What's disappearing?

- The Biblical World View from Western Culture
- The large number of believers across the Western world who are either walking away from active faith or faith altogether in their young adult years.
- Thousands of churches across the Western world are either closing or winding down as the heavily represented pre-1945 (Builder) and 1946-64 (Boomer) generations enter their twilight years and pass from this life.

So we come today to commission Julian and Karene to be a part of our answer to Jesus' call and the world in which we find ourselves. At a staff level we're trying to make a generational shift as we must if this church is to survive. While Julian and Claire technically were born in the baby boomer generation, the age of their teenage children point to closer links with the next generation.

As I said in preparation for our last church meeting:

'It seemed to me that if we're going to progress as a community we must focus inwards, outwards and upwards. The upwards, hopefully we do every day as we pray and every time we gather to worship God together - the outwards and the inwards primarily in relation to the church's future.'

Their task will be to motivate us, empower us, encourage us and work with us in their called areas so that they and we will be instruments under God to roll back the darkness and to see in our time something fresh under the good hand of God. As Luke wrote **'the two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit.....** we're commending them to that way today.