

*Sermon on Acts 20:1-16 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

This week the Shradar kids had their last games of the Spring season - volleyball and soccer. Over these last months I have spent most of the time with Ewen and his soccer team. His first season so lots of learning. Streaks of success, and moments of needed improvement! Monday, at our last practice, in the heat, it was a feat to keep the kids engaged and on task. During their practice scrimmage I watched them playing with no zip, no energy - so I called Ewen over and threw water on his head to wake him up... and it worked!

To be honest... that like watching the church sometimes... We are tired folk, it is hot on the field and we could use some zip. The thing is, some of the stuff we have looked to for the “zip” over the years just leaves us more exhausted and missing the mission we are called to.

It is to the church in Acts we look for a remedy. First to see if they were are church with pizzazz on the field, and second if we can tap into what fueled them for life. And maybe we will catch it!

**Acts 20:1-16**

I have a big idea but you have to wait for it, stay awake for it!

Here we have the church on mission modeled for us. After years of ministry, this region of the world, Greece, Macedonia, Asia, has been evangelized. You can't miss the proclamation of Jesus as the church flourishes and grows.

Forgiveness of sin preached, a Savior embraced. It can be hard for us to notice the time it took however. The whole of the book of Acts represents thirty years! So we have Paul on these missionary journeys, staying in some cities for three years at a time. Discipling, working among the people, building relationships, teaching how the good news of Jesus affects every area of life.

Paul now is packing up and preparing to take financial support from these churches to the church in Jerusalem before going west. His desire to go to places the name of Jesus is not known.

In Luke's account of this transition we see some attributes of the church and we must discover what it is that keeps them going.

Three attributes and the fuel of the church...

**1) Mixed Multitude**

Paul encourages the disciples and says his farewells, as he travels he imparts more words of help, he keeps going. There is a plot to kill him so he goes back the other way. But Paul is not alone. He is surrounded with ministry partners.

Luke takes the time to name some of them showing the importance of having these believers as part of the church.

Paul is certainly a father, an Apostle, leading and discipling those that are discipling others. But we can't for a moment miss that he was never alone - we have mentioned this before. Here the list is long, and incomplete. We have seven named and still the term "us" that Luke uses to describe himself and the rest of the ministry team.

And of the seven listed they are not all from Antioch, the original missionary sending church, these men hale from hometowns in the region. And there is great diversity here. Which given the context and environment is extraordinary.

A Berean, Thessalonian, some from Galatia, a couple from Asia. The tone of their skin was most likely different, the depth of their experience was different, the cultures they knew best while still Roman in governance were different.

Yet here they are traveling together. Purposed to be united. A new family formed in the church and spreading the message of the church as they go.

Fascinating we don't do a lot of this in our day. The church, too often, is defined by who dominates the pulpit, you go to "So and so's church." But in our text, and through Acts, we don't get the sense that a church would ever be defined this way - they will become inclined toward individual preachers but it is corrected as sin. This is Jesus' church. Multicultural. Multitude. Ministry was not about just one or a few, but a lot of people, in fact the whole church is on mission. They come into Troas, maybe for the first time, and they have church.

Every member ministry at its best. Varied vocations, gifting and they all are engaged, producing in the church for the mission of the church.

The church, people from far and wide in geography and socio-economic status, reshaped into a family, and they are doing really normal, but important things.

## **2) Mundane**

This second attribute lacks the glitz we may desire in the modern church but if we want to finish the race that is set before us, this will become our story too.

Now mundane can be defined two ways, "lacking excitement" or "of this earthly world rather than the heavenly one." And I think both apply.

Luke may be trying to spice up the story a bit with some fun details but this is the normal ministry of the church.

They come together (on Sunday - the first day of the week) for the breaking of bread. For a time of rehearsing the truths they believe and using the sacrament of communion to highlight their hope.

But this wasn't a brief meal where they would come in, get the elements, speak a few pleasantries and then go home to binge Netflix.

Paul has one night in town, so he gave everything he had. He prolongs his speech until midnight! Now in the first century, it is likely that many of these people worked a full day, until sunset (9?) then gathered in an upper room of a house that could hold the lot of them.

There are many torches in the room and a bunch of bodies, so the oxygen level probably isn't that high. If we doze off in an air conditioned room with only a forty minute sermon, we can imagine what a hot, fummy room at midnight after a day of hard labor could have been like.

And Paul keeps going. Like any good preacher he just keeps talking!

And our boy Eutychus goes to the window to get some air. Have you ever been driving and falling asleep and open the window? In grad school I can remember making long trips back to Nebraska, going down the interstate like a dog with my head out the window!

This is exactly what Euty is doing. He doesn't want to fall asleep. I think he genuinely wants to participate and hear what Paul preaches. But Paul talked longer and longer. His eyelids couldn't battle anymore and he is overcome by sleep. But this is an awful place to sleep, three stories up in an open window.

Here is the excitement of the service. As Eutychus falls to the ground below. Taken up dead.

I like that Paul doesn't let the ushers handle it, he goes downstairs and ministers to the young man, and pronounces that his life is in him. "No worries, he is alive!" Then back to communion.

And when Paul had broken bread and eaten he conversed with them a long while... Until morning when he leaves.

Eutychus is alive and the church is greatly comforted.

This is the spice Luke includes to engage us, but otherwise this is really normal activity of normal people in the church. The breaking of bread, coming together for long meetings (quite opposite of the sense of adventure we are convinced we need to have - the thrill).

What does the church offer? Prayer, the Apostles' teaching and one another.

No one left, everyone stayed in the upper room, everyone participated. It is as if the believers hoped it would never end!

They have a diversity of people in the room, they share a meal as the regular action of the life of the church. This is their priority. Formed and now functioning as a family plodding along.

But along they will go.

### **3) Movement**

The church, the multitude experiencing the mundane, is headed somewhere - the mission is moving forward, to the churches to encourage, to Troas for revival, to Jerusalem and onward to Rome... The ends of the earth taken seriously, living as those sent. The highest of priorities. Nothing gets in the way.

You should know there is one place in the New Testament where the church no longer advances, where it actually stays put and never leaves the borders of their place. That is in the new city, the new earth with Christ reigning for eternity!

But for the rest of the book, there is movement - I think it is even a covenant continuance of the way in which Israel is constantly moving (even when they have a promised land they are meant to stay in!) The church ever expanding and invading new territory, pollinating cultures, freeing those bound by darkness.

This is the purpose of the church. Get this! Not my preference. Not necessarily my felt need in a given moment. Not my social connection... but the movement, the mission.

**Matthew 28:18–20** “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)  
Getting back to the basics of the commission of the church. In Acts 20 it is serious, and all the church is about.

Under the powerful authority of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the church making disciples of all ethne, all people until the end of the age.

Made ambassadors of Christ, agents of reconciliation, God making his appeal to the world through the church!

On they go. The troupe meets up with Paul and he has a goal, the quickest route to Jerusalem, the quickest route to the continued missionary movement.

The church, made up of a flavor of the all nations. Living together through long stretches of mundane. And always on the move to make disciples.

Why? Why in the heck would the church form this way? How do they have the energy for it? Is it mere hobby or is there something deeper at play?

What doesn't keep them: diversity - their difference might be novel but in itself doesn't have the stickiness to keep them together; sacrifice - shared experience in giving things up? They certainly have it but it is not the act of sacrifice that makes them unified and a family; What of persecution? If they are all going to be harrassed and harmed maybe it is safer to stick together... but if there is nothing deeper they would just disband.

There is something that brings together the multitude, that empowers the mundane, and that is the point of the movement.

#### **4) Message**

Paul travels and Luke describes what he does as "encouraging them" or "giving much encouragement." Paracalaes. Help...

Paul is not running around saying "you are so handsome, you are so talented, you are the best yeah!" He is certainly cheering on the church, but it is what he uses to encourage that matters.

We know Paul well enough to know what how he is encouraging, what the words he uses are.

He preaches the GOSPEL. The good news of Jesus. This is all Paul's got, and he knows nothing among any of them but Christ and him crucified.

That God the Son himself took on flesh and lived a perfectly obedient life, spoke of the arrival of his kingdom, and was tortured and executed in order to fulfill old Prophetic promises of who the anointed one, the Messiah, the Savior of humanity would be.

In his death he took on the total weight of sin for those that belong to him. The burden, the condemnation, the punishment. Even in death he has victory as he was not meant to decay in the grave, but be glorified, having defeated death.

And those that believe in him are gifted his life of perfection, the death of absolution, his new life. Forgiveness. Purpose. And a family to experience it with.

It enlivens the dead, it gives meaning to life, it fuels the church for the mission. That's why we don't cling to anything else! The church in Acts held it tightly, preached it widely and it was their spinach for the struggles, their essential oil for the ailments, their weaponry for every battle.

They were fully awake to the gospel and it changed the world.

## **The church's fuel in life is gospel wakefulness!**

Owning the truth of Jesus and "treasuring Christ more greatly and savoring His power more sweetly than before" (Wilson).

How might we describe these believers in Acts 20 had we met them and spent time with them... very much human... but so awakened to the reality and goodness of Christ. Their driving passion. Their center. Their everything.

Centuries later - this is our hope as well, this is what is meant to fuel our body of believers. There is great danger church in assuming the gospel. "Yeah, Yeah, that's what we need to get saved, but now let me focus on my niche, my preferences..."

It is through, with and back around to the gospel we are meant to go for the energy to thrive, for the hope of our future, the refreshing drink for the parched souls around us.

And we live in constant need of reclaiming this truth. Embracing it. Going deeper into the depths of the grace of Christ for us and for the world he calls his.

The story of Eutychus isn't really about falling asleep in church... but we make it that because that's our experience. A physical slumber that only reveals a far more dangerous spiritual slumber. What the church needs is to wake up to the gospel. Here is the adventure. That you know the creator of the universe and you are cool - because the righteousness of Christ is yours.

This is the thing that brings together those vastly different from one another - that have no other reason to be merely friends and yet they are made family. Identity in Christ.

"Our world knows that multicultural diversity is beautiful, but try as it may, seems unable to achieve it. We in the church have an opportunity to show that the gospel can accomplish what the world is incapable of." Greear

This is the thing that carries us through the routine of gathering, breaking bread together, hearing the word of the Lord... the thing that bring us together to pray for revival, that others would hear the good news. And imagine, it might even fuel us to desire to be with one another for long stretches of time!

This is thing that fuels the movement of the church into our neighborhoods, into our workplaces, across the river and over the oceans... to share the loving kindness of God, the forgiveness found in Jesus.

"Gospel-saturated people become visionaries. The gospel shows us the compassion of God for the world and his willingness to change it. The gospel is the single greatest catalyst for innovation in mission." Greear

This is what fills a reservoir and what is released from it, bringing the cool water of Jesus to those dying of thirst near and far.

If the fuel is a wakefulness, a hunger, an embrace of the gospel all the way home, the church will be unstoppable. As believers we will be undeterred. But if we miss it, “danger Will Robinson!”

“Martin Luther has a parable or a dream about how on one occasion the devil sat upon his throne listening to his agents report on the progress they had made in opposing the truth of Christ and destroying the souls of men and women. One spirit said there was a company of Christians crossing the desert. “I loosed the lions upon them, and soon the sands of the desert were strewn with their mangled corpses.”

“What of that?” answered Satan. “The lions destroyed their bodies, but their souls were saved. It is their souls that I am after.”

Another reported, “There was a company of Christian pilgrims sailing through the sea on a vessel. I sent a great wind against the ship that drove the ship on the rocks, and every Christian aboard the ship was drowned.”

“What of that?” said Satan. “Their bodies were drowned in the sea, but their souls were saved. It is their souls that I am after.”

The third came forward to give his report, and he said, “For ten years I have been trying to cast a Christian into a deep sleep, and at last I have succeeded.” And with that the corridors of Hell rang with shouts of malignant triumph.”

If we are asleep, let us hear God’s call today!

The gospel is our splash of water each week - we throw the gospel on each other and say “now get back out there and play with zip!”

**Ephesians 5:14** “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (ESV)

**Romans 13:11–12** “the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. [12] The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (ESV)

**The church’s fuel in life is gospel wakefulness!**

*Response:*

**Wake up** - Wake up to the truth of the gospel, come to Christ. Believe in him.

Wake up to the truth of the gospel, to your identity in Christ, no longer condemned, now claimed, made a child of God, empowered to live!

“Really, there are only two steps to gospel wakefulness: be utterly broken and be utterly awed. But neither of these things are things you can really do. They are things only God can do for you.” Wilson

Position yourself to catch the gospel. Read the word, find community that preaches it to you, show up where it will be rehearsed, pray for it to be unleashed. If our slumber is due to sin in our lives, we must repent, do a U-turn, and allow the joy of Christ refill us.

Once we wake up...

**Sound the Alarm** - Ask the Lord to use you to wake some folks up. That you would be so filled with gospel life it would spill out of you.

It is contagious. Story of Hudson Taylor’s friendship that reframed his view of spiritual health:

“Cultured, genial and overflowing with mother-wit, he was an ideal companion. Sacred music was his delight. A wonderful fund of varied anecdotes gave charm to his society, and he was generous in recalling his experiences for the benefit of others. And this man, the friendship of this man, with all he was and had been, was the gift and blessing of God at this particular juncture to Hudson Taylor. Under its influence he grew and expanded and came to an understanding of spiritual values that left its impress on his whole life after. William Burns was better to him than a college course with all its advantages, because he lived out before him, right there in China, the reality of all he most needed to be and know.”

May we be that for each other, and everyone we meet...

**The church's fuel for life is gospel wakefulness.**

May the Lord increasingly awaken us to the good news of his finished work on the cross, of his empowerment for life, of his purpose for the church. That we would be fueled by it to play with inexhaustible vitality for the glory of Jesus.