

07-21-13 - Community: A Building Block of a Healthy Church Acts 19:1-20:1

The Book of Acts, as you might already know, is the second part of Luke's gospel writing. It is the continuation, the second scroll, and keeps to the same geographical order as the gospel. Luke follows Jesus ministry from the beginning and works its way toward the goal, Jerusalem. The main event for Luke is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Acts picks up from Jerusalem at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and works outwardly from there to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Rome) as is stated in **Acts 1:8 - "...but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."** (NASBu) The book of Acts is all about how the Holy Spirit is now active in the world continuing the mission of God in bringing salvation in Jesus Christ to the lost of the world by working through the life and ministry of true believers. Our text today is in the last portion of Acts when the mission of God is reaching the remotest parts of the Earth (ROME).

This was Paul's second visit to Ephesus. He was there about a year and a half before this visit while on his second missionary journey. He found them to be receptive to his ministry and Gospel message about Jesus. He determined to get back there and build a community of believers. Paul would find himself at Ephesus for almost three years this time, teaching and working among the people there, both Jews and Greeks.

Ephesus was on the western coast of Asia Minor, and at the time of Paul, it was the capital city of the newly formed Roman province of Asia – modern day Turkey. Its wealth and vitality was due to two major factors. First was its location for trade and commerce. The second was its worship of Artemis, a multi-breasted goddess of fertility, whose temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Due to erosion and other physical factors, Ephesus became more and more dependent on business brought in from tourism and trade associated with the temple and cult of Artemis.

Acts 19:1-7 – The Message -

Now, it happened that while Apollos was away in Corinth, Paul made his way down through the mountains, came to Ephesus, and happened on some disciples there. The first thing he said was, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Did you take God into your mind only, or did you also embrace him with your heart? Did he get inside you?"

"We've never even heard of that—a Holy Spirit? God within us?"

³ *"How were you baptized, then?" asked Paul.*

"In John's baptism."

⁴ *“That explains it,” said Paul. “John preached a baptism of radical life-change so that people would be ready to receive the One coming after him, who turned out to be Jesus. If you’ve been baptized in John’s baptism, you’re ready now for the real thing, for Jesus.”*

⁵⁻⁷ *And they were. As soon as they heard of it, they were baptized in the name of the Master Jesus. Paul put his hands on their heads and the Holy Spirit entered them. From that moment on, they were praising God in tongues and talking about God’s actions. Altogether there were about twelve people there that day.*

Beginning a Healthy Community Requires: Commitment, Conversation, and Care

Commitment: So Paul made his way through the hill country to find Ephesus because of his commitment to them from his last visit. **Acts 18:19-21 - I’ll be back. –**

They landed in Ephesus, where Priscilla and Aquila got off and stayed. Paul left the ship briefly to go to the meeting place and preach to the Jews. They wanted him to stay longer, but he said he couldn’t. But after saying good-bye, he promised, “I’ll be back, God willing.”

Upon his arrival, he found himself among some "disciples." These 12 men professed to be Jewish believers who were claiming to follow this new movement introduced by John the Baptist.

Conversation: We assume them to be true believers, Christians, followers belonging to Jesus Christ, but Paul makes no such assumptions. Maybe it was something about them, or maybe Paul just isn't taking anything for granted. He begins building this healthy community by engaging them in conversation and asking questions.

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Their answer shows Paul their true spiritual condition. They never heard of the Holy Spirit. They may have claimed to be disciples, and they may have been considered by others to be disciples.

The truth is they were not true believers in Jesus Christ at all. It wasn't really their fault.

Listen how Eugene Peterson phrases this verse in the Message... Acts 19:2 ...

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Did you take God into your mind only, or did you also embrace Him with your heart? Did He get inside you?"

Care: Paul asks another question, ***"Into what then were you baptized?"*** They respond, "Into John's baptism."

Let's look at their mentor and his teaching at that time. **Acts 18:24-26 -**

A man named Apollos came to Ephesus. He was a Jew, born in Alexandria, Egypt, and a terrific speaker, eloquent and powerful in his preaching of the Scriptures. He was well-educated in the way of the Master and fiery in his enthusiasm. Apollos was accurate in everything he taught about Jesus up to a point, but he only went as far as the baptism of John. He preached with power in the meeting place. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and told him the rest of the story.

They were only taught to the level of their teacher at that time. We try to teach you, the community, as best we can, but there's always more to learn. From here, Paul teaches them about John's baptism and that it was all part of a plan of God that pointed to Jesus. They are convinced and believe in Jesus. They are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, and upon the laying on of Paul's hands, they are filled with the Holy Spirit with evidences of this fact.

The evidence of tongues and prophecy are somewhat incidental to the main event. However, this was the same evidence of the Holy Spirit that we have seen in the previous three such occurrences in the book of Acts. The day of Pentecost to the Jews in Acts 2. When Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans in Acts 8. When Peter visited the Gentile centurion Cornelius and his household in Acts 10, and here in Acts 19. Each occurrence was a different group of people and exhibited the same evidences. Each occurrence validated the invokers. This occurrence validated Paul as an official apostle as he also invoked the Holy Spirit upon this group of disciples as evidenced by the manifestations we just read about.

Growing a Healthy Community is Cultivated by: Time, Courage, and Modeling

READ: Acts 19:8-10

⁸⁻¹⁰ Paul then went straight to the meeting place. He had the run of the place for three months, doing his best to make the things of the kingdom of God real and convincing to them. But then resistance began to form as some of them began spreading evil rumors through the congregation about the Christian way of life. So Paul left, taking the disciples with him, and set up shop in the school of Tyrannus, holding class there daily. He did this for two years, giving everyone in the province of Asia, Jews as well as Greeks, ample opportunity to hear the Message of the Master.

Time: Paul gave up three months of his time and energy teaching in the synagogues and an additional two years teaching and lecturing at the school of Tyrannus.

At this time there were philosophers who would lecture, and crowds would gather to hear the teachings of these wise men. Tyrannus was one of these lecturers. Whenever he was not lecturing, the room or podium would be free for others to come and lecture.

Paul took advantage of the Greek intellectual system to teach about The Lord Jesus and God's plan of salvation through Him. So Paul taught daily in this place, leading many to a saving knowledge of Jesus and bringing many converts to Christ from their old lives of idolatry and sin. However, this was not met with enthusiasm from all.

Courage: Paul spoke boldly, bravely about the kingdom of God. Luke says he "reasoned" with them. That means he was able to field their questions and stay on target with the Gospel message. Our message about Christ is not some mindless or low intellect level message. We should be able to reason with people to persuade them about Jesus intellectually as well as spiritually. The goal is to win over their way of thinking so they surrender their mind and will over to The Lord Jesus Christ.

I used to think, "What if they ask something I can't answer?" Would I lose credibility. Can I successfully argue Christ in the face of their attacks? We have to step out of ourselves when witnessing for Jesus. It's not about us or our skill or our reputation. It's all about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will do the work. He convicts the world of sin, not us. He draws people to The Lord, not us. We just obey and deliver the message.

Modeling: Paul modeled how to reach others for Jesus. He taught them and sent them off to do the same thing. Soon, vs. 10 tells us, "***all who lived in Asia heard the word of The Lord, both Jews and Greeks.***"

Acts 19:11-20 - We won't go into this section in detail. Paul's message was so effective that many sorcerers and magicians and idolaters came to faith in Christ. They made a public bon fire and sacrificed their books in the fire. I remember a specific day when I took all my record albums and put them in the garbage. I had a friend who lit his BBQ and sacrificed his pot on the fire. He said the enemy (Satan) caused the smoke to come to him and tantalize him wherever he stood trying to persuade him back. Are there things in your life from the past that you can't or haven't let go of yet? Maybe it's time to sacrifice them to The Lord and start afresh in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ensuring a Community Will Endure - Demands Plowing Together Through Crisis

There's a story of a father who was in his study reading, and he heard a commotion outside the window. It was his daughter who was playing with her friends. And it got louder, and it got louder and more heated and more argumentative, until finally he could restrain himself no longer. He pushed the window open and said, "Stop it. Honey, what's wrong?" After the reprimand, she responded quickly, "But Daddy, we were just playing church." (Leslie Flynn, Great Church Fights).

A community, even a healthy community, is not immune to crisis. (19:23-30)

The conversion of so many in Ephesus caused a dip in the trade of the city, since people stopped buying the souvenirs and Artemis items they made, the economy was impacted by Paul's teaching. The leading people rebelled violently. Wouldn't it be great if the church caused such a disturbance in society that we were considered a threat?

Demetrius, a silversmith rallied all the other merchants together to voice their concern. He mentioned that the City's financial state was dependent on the sale of this merchandise. He blamed Paul and his preaching on their financial demise...

He rounded up his workers and others similarly employed and said, "Men, you well know that we have a good thing going here—and you've seen how Paul has barged in and discredited what we're doing by telling people that there's no such thing as a god made with hands. A lot of people are going along with him, not only here in Ephesus but all through Asia province. (v. 26)

There will be those in our communities that will try to undermine our efforts for the Kingdom of God. There was an attempt to overthrow this new movement. All the people cried out "***Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.***" The city was filled with confusion (isn't that a great attack from the enemy?). The din of noise of the crowd shouting, "***Great is Artemis of the Ephesians***" was overpowering the reality of Paul's message - or so it seemed.

A crisis was going on, but rather than stop the movement of God's mission, it accelerated it. This was a violent rebellion. They even took Paul's companions and might have killed them. Paul wanted to come to their aid, but the disciples would not allow him. Things looked bad for a while. How do we react when things are going wrong? What do we do or how do we act when the unforeseen crisis manifests?

A community that stands together will outlast the crisis - (19:31-41)

The people were in a frenzy. As many people who are confronted with what they can't sensibly argue against, they just started yelling, "***Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!***" They tried to over shout anything that could be said with reason for two hours straight.

Sometimes, in times of crisis, people don't even realize why they have gathered together in rebellion to begin with...

Some were yelling one thing, some another. Most of them had no idea what was going on or why they were there. As the Jews pushed Alexander to the front to try to gain control, different factions clamored to get him on their side. But he brushed them off and quieted the mob with an impressive sweep of his arms. But the moment he opened his mouth and they knew he was a Jew, they shouted him down: "Great Artemis of the Ephesians! Great Artemis of the Ephesians!"—on and on and on, for over two hours. (v. 32) Like a kid holding his ears and shouting...

We need to stay focused on the mission of God. We are to bring people to Christ for their own good - for their eternal salvation. This is what all people want down deep inside. We have the answer to their question of life - it's Jesus Christ - the Savior - The Lord.

The Town Clerk managed to get the crowd under control and told them that if there was a legitimate complaint, it should be taken up in the court. This seemed to calm them.

With things back in order, Paul was able to move on to other areas of Asia Minor and bring the Good News of Jesus to the people there.

"It's a wonderful thing to be in a foxhole with someone else. Mutual fellowship *stirs others to good works*. *The writer was in a church in Reno that had a sign at the driveway as you exited from the church that said, 'Now entering the mission field.'*"

For this church, this community, to be a healthy community, we need to stand together and be single focused on the mission of God. Yes - some issues will arise and we may face a crisis, large or small, but if we remain focused on the mission, the Holy Spirit will guide us through it and keep this community on track.

A community that outlasts crisis is strong enough for the challenges of change (19:21).

After all this had come to a head, Paul decided it was time to move on to Macedonia and Achaia provinces, and from there to Jerusalem. "Then," he said, "I'm off to Rome. I've got to see Rome!"

20:1 - With things back to normal, Paul called the disciples together and encouraged them to keep up the good work in Ephesus. Then, saying his good-byes, he left for Macedonia.

The community made it through their crisis. They were stronger, healthier now. They were ready for the next stage. Paul was going to move on from there to carry out his mission in a different city. The Ephesians would be left on their own to continue the work by the power of the Holy Spirit. They were ready for this change.

So how about you - this church - this community. Have you been strengthened by crisis and trusting the Holy Spirit to bring you through? Are you going through the crisis right now? Well - when you get through it. You will be ready for the change God has planned for you here. In the meantime focus on the mission, and carry out God's purposes by the power of the Holy Spirit within you. Stand together through it - united and pray.

I don't know what God has in mind for us, but I know he is bringing about change. Are you ready? Can you handle it? The answer is YES, because he doesn't expect us to deal with any of this alone. We have The Holy Spirit to guide us.

As Eugene Peterson said it, "Did you take God into your mind only, or did you also embrace Him with your heart? Did he get inside you?"

He needs to be inside us all the time, guiding, directing, discerning, leading us on to what God has purposed for us as a community of believers.