

Today is Pentecost Sunday—the day we celebrate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the birthday of the Big C Church, the moment in Acts 2 when the Spirit falls on the disciples of Jesus gathered after his ascension. And, fittingly, we are beginning a new series today back in Acts; last summer we preached through the first half of Acts and this summer we’re doing Acts part 2: the road trip.

We have probably all taken a summer road trip of one kind or another. road trips are my absolute fave, but I have learned there are lots of different ways to do a road trip. Some road trips are meticulously planned and expertly executed, right down to the cooler packed with sandwiches and the scheduled side excursions. Some road trips are about heading in a general direction and stopping at whatever roadside diner looks good, making hotel or campsite reservations as you go. Some road trips are motivated by getting to a particular destination, and others are more about simply escaping whatever it is we’re leaving behind.

In this second half of Acts we will hit the road with the apostle Paul and his companions. We’ll actually take three separate trips over the course of the summer. And to be fair, these trips will probably involve about as much time on the water as on the road, so we’re using the term “road trip” pretty loosely. At any rate, I have no idea if Paul is a sandwich packer or roadside diner kind of guy, but I do know that Paul’s road trips aren’t motivated by getting to a particular destination or escaping the stresses of a 9–5 at home; Paul and his friends are motivated by a mission. And their road trip is driven by the Holy Spirit.

Before we jump right into the middle of Acts, we’re going to take just a minute to do a super quick review of the first half of Acts and kind of get ourselves situated in the bigger picture of the book of Acts. We’re going to do that this morning by watching a short clip from the Bible Project.

****watch video: [Bible Project clip](#)****

That Bible Project video goes on to do a great job of outlining the whole rest of the book of Acts. We don’t have time to watch the whole thing this morning, but If you’re interested, I’d encourage you to google “Bible Project Acts Part 2” and check it out. Just like last year, we’re going to move through Acts at a pretty good clip this

summer and that's going to require some homework on your part. Each week we'll put the larger passage we're covering in the newsletter and then read and preach on just a portion of that each Sunday. This morning we're actually going to barely dip a toe into Acts chapter 13; there's so much more there you're going to want to read before Don preaches on Acts 14 next week.

These first two weeks of the series we will be covering Paul's first missionary journey. I think there's a rule somewhere that you can't preach on the second half of Acts without pulling out a map, so here's a [map](#) of that first trip. Today Paul and Barnabas will leave Antioch, travel down to Seleucia, take a boat from there to the island of Cyprus, land at Salamis and then road trip all the way across the island to Paphos. After they've spent time in Paphos, they'll sail to Perga in Pamphylia and then travel up to Pisidian Antioch, which is not to be confused with regular Antioch, where their journey began. Next week we'll catch back up with them as they head to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.

As we travel with Paul this summer, there are three themes I want you to be watching for. I want you to note how Paul and his companions are...

1: Forming diverse communities of believers where people from very different backgrounds interact as equals

2: Trusting in and submitted to the power of the Spirit

3: Sharing the good news in both word and action

Today we're going to see all three of these themes in play right away in these opening verses of chapter 13.

Open your Bibles to chapter 13 and let's start with verse 1.

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.

Right away in this very first sentence, Luke gives us a window into the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Antioch church. Lucius was from Cyrene, which is in North

Africa, and Simeon called Niger (which means black) would have also been of African descent. The other three men were all educated Jews, but from very different places: Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus, Manean, Luke tells us, grew up with Herod the King, and Saul (or Paul) was originally from Tarsus. It would be easy for us to skip past this list of names but many scholars note its significance in establishing that the leaders of the church in Antioch came from very diverse backgrounds and that African Christians were among those that first anointed and sent out the apostle Paul.

Now a quick word about the whole Saul/Paul name situation. Before Acts 13 he is known exclusively as Saul, but in verse 9 of this chapter we read that he is also known as Paul, and from here on out that's what he'll be called. Many people assume this name change happens at his conversion but it actually happens here when he is sent out on mission. See, Paul was both a Jew and a Roman citizen. Roman citizens had three names: a praenomen, a nomen and a cognomen. The praenomen was a personal, given name (like John); the nomen was a family name that indicated their clan association (like Smith); and the cognomen was a nickname or descriptor, used to distinguish one John Smith from another, since the pool of praenomen and nomen choices were pretty limited. Saul was obviously Paul's Jewish given name, in honor of King Saul. Most often Roman Jews had a Roman cognomen that sounded like their given Jewish name. So Paul was his cognomen. When Paul goes out on mission here in Acts 13, he begins to use his Roman cognomen rather than his Jewish given name because he is primarily preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

So...we see that first theme—forming diverse communities of believers—at work in several ways right away in this very first verse.

If we keep reading, we'll see our second theme—trusting in and submitting to the power of the Holy Spirit—emerge in the next several verses. Look with me starting in verse 2 :

While they were worshiping 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 two of

them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

This is actually the first time we see the church anoint and send out their own leaders on purpose to other places. Before this point, the gospel spreads as a result of persecution—the Church is scattered in self-defense rather than through intentional mission. But this new plan to send out folks on mission isn't an idea they cook up on their own—it's in response to a clear movement of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 2 the HS speaks and the HS calls. And in verse 4 the HS sends.

As one scholar says about these verses: *Luke has stripped away any ambiguity about who is driving this story. This is the Spirit's doing, the Spirit's work.*

It's important for us to notice the pattern of how this happens because—while *what* the Spirit is doing here is new, *how* he does it is not. We've seen the same pattern at work throughout the book of Acts. The believers worship, pray and fast, the Spirit prompts, and *then* the people move forward in mission.

When we get this out of order—when we get impatient and jump straight to mission, when we decide we just have to DO *something*—that's when we get ourselves in trouble.

In fact, last year at this time we were preaching on Acts 1 and Acts 1 is all about waiting for the Holy Spirit. Here's what we said last year: **If the mission isn't driven by the Holy Spirit, it's not the mission of Jesus.**

In Acts 1, it's Jesus who tells the disciples to wait for the Spirit. And what do they do while they wait? Verse 14 tells us *they all joined together constantly in prayer.*

It's the same pattern in both places—Acts 1 and Acts 13. The Church does what it can do: worship, pray, fast. And the Spirit does what only He can do: speak, guide, equip, set them apart, empower them and call them into mission.

Theologian William James Jennings says: *Wherever women and men give themselves to the disciplines that attune the body to its hunger for the Spirit, they*

will find themselves receptive to the voice of God and they will hear the Spirit speaking and giving guidance.

Our job is to wait for the Spirit. But we ready ourselves to hear His voice and receive His guidance by practicing the disciplines that, as Jennings says, “attune the body to its hunger for the Spirit.”

In those early chapters of Acts, the Spirit was gathering His Church and forming a radically new kind of community.

Here’s what we said about that last year:

As we step into Acts and begin to study the work of the Holy Spirit in birthing and advancing Christ’s church, the Spirit is inviting us to step into some new adventures, to receive the fresh wind of His Spirit moving among us, to grow and stretch and experiment with new ways of living out God’s Kingdom reality together in our community. I’m excited to watch and see what God will do.

One year later we can look back and see just exactly what God has done and continues to do as we have experimented with new ways of living out God’s Kingdom reality together as a community over the last year.

But here’s the lesson of Acts 13. When we continue in the disciplines, when we commit ourselves to worship and prayer and fasting, the Spirit doesn’t usually show up to say, “Hey, just here to say: great job! Keep getting more comfy with your Wed night tacos and baked potato bars!”

No, the Spirit comes to say, “This? This is beautiful. And now we’re going to share that beauty with others.”

The lesson here in Acts 13 is that the Spirit gathers us to send us out.

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 hands on them and sent them off.

Just a few weeks ago we placed our hands on our grads and sent them off to new adventures and new places of mission and ministry. A few weeks before that we placed our hands on Lane and Linnea Rahlf, key volunteer leaders in our Warehouse ministry, and sent them off to new adventures and new ministry opportunities in SC. And a few weeks from now, we'll place our hands on yet another couple who've been vital leaders and prophets and teachers and prayer warriors in our ministry over the last 5 years and we'll send them off.

This is what the Spirit does. He calls us, He gathers us, He forms us in community and then He sends us out. There are lots of different ways we are sent. Thankfully, not all of us have to move away to be sent! I'm quite certain and hopeful that the Spirit has a mission for most of us right here in Decorah. But there is a sense in which our sending is always costly to the Body. In Acts 13, the Holy Spirit asks this Antioch church to release two of their *key leaders* to head out on a new mission. And they did, without hesitation.

I'm convinced this is because they were united in prayer and fasting, practicing the very disciplines we've been learning about in Practicing the Way this year. When we give ourselves to these disciplines, we are attuned and receptive to the voice of the Spirit. We are ready to trust and submit to His leading, even when it is costly. We have the courage to move out of our places of comfort and into new areas of mission and ministry together, even when that involves sacrifice.

Which leads us to our third theme: sharing the good news in word and action. Because that is precisely what Paul and Barnabas are sent out to do. We don't have time to do a deep dive on what happens next with this Jewish sorcerer and the Roman preconsul but I do want to highlight a couple of things here briefly.

When we are faithfully responding to the call and anointing of the Holy Spirit, our lives *will* tell the story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember what we said last year? *If the mission isn't driven by the Holy Spirit, it's not the mission of Jesus.*

But the opposite is also true: *If the mission IS driven by the Holy Spirit, you can be quite certain it IS the mission of Jesus.*

And the mission of Jesus is to restore and redeem, to seek and save the lost. To bring healing and wholeness to all of creation. And so, if the Spirit is anointing and calling and sending us, we can be clear that THIS is what He's anointing and calling and sending us to do.

And here's the thing about the movement of God's Spirit: we cannot control how and when He will move and we are not that great at predicting who will respond. I think it's pretty safe to say that as Paul and Barnabas sailed to Cyprus they would not have guessed that their first convert would be the Roman governor of the whole island. But that's precisely what happened. They might also have been surprised that their Jewish connection to this Roman official, Elymas, was actually working against them. That, for self-promoting, money-grabbing reasons, Elymas put himself between the people he was supposed to be serving and the gift of grace God had for them.

Because Paul and Barnabas were attuned to the Spirit, they had eyes to see what was happening: that the Roman preconsul (who they might consider an enemy) was hungry for the Gospel, and that the Jewish sorcerer (who they would have considered one of their own) was an obstacle to God's grace.

Paul's words to Elymas in verses 10 and 11 might sound pretty harsh to us, but they are no more harsh than Jesus' words to the religious leaders standing between the people of God and the gifts of God in Jerusalem. And verse 9 is very clear that Paul only speaks when he is filled with the Holy Spirit. This isn't *Paul's* anger being expressed, this is the righteous indignation of a God who will not tolerate those who would seek to gatekeep His lavish grace and mercy.

As we seek to share the good news through our words and actions, we, too, might find ourselves surprised by who actually responds and who stands in our way. It is only in submitting wholly to the power and wisdom of the Spirit that we will have the discernment to see what God is up to, to notice where he might be at work in unexpected places, to recognize resistance or gatekeeping even in our own selves.

So what is our work today? A few weeks ago we talked about the importance of being a prayerful church and I think this is precisely what Acts 13 is calling us to, as well. If we want to be people who recognize and respond to the work of the Spirit, who trust the Spirit and submit to his His calling and sending even when its costly, who see people from diverse backgrounds through the eyes of Jesus rather than through our own cultural lens, we need to give ourselves to prayer and fasting, to practicing those spiritual disciplines that attune the body to its hunger for the Spirit. This is how, as Jennings says, *we will find ourselves receptive to the voice of God and will hear the Spirit speaking and giving guidance.*

And this is how we will know when we are being called, anointed and sent out on mission to a world in desperate need of Jesus.