

And You Will Be My Witnesses – Acts of the Apostles – Week 4

Hello, God's People -- We've all heard the phrase: "When God closes one door, He opens another." This is particularly true in chapters 13 to 16 as the Holy Spirit calls the shots.

We begin with Saul/Paul and Barnabas being singled out for the first great missionary journey. There are successes and failures. Things start well in Antioch of Pisidia, but end with the missionaries being driven out of the region. Rather than lose themselves to despair, "the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." – 13:57

In Lystra, Paul is stoned, dragged out of the city and left for dead. But recall Gamaliel's words in an earlier chapter: "[if this plan] is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them." -- 5:39

The gospel is on the move. But there is conflict within the Church and among close friends. Chapter 15, begins with the leaders in Jerusalem struggling to find a way to continue preaching to the Gentiles, while still remaining true to their Jewish roots. You can almost hear them asking: What is God up to? The chapter ends with a fierce argument between Paul and Barnabas.

In chapter 16, the Holy Spirit forbids Paul and his companions from preaching in Asia. They try to take their message to Bithynia, but again the Spirit slams the door. A greater mission awaits. But Paul, Silas, Timothy and the others did not know what would happen. Imagine their frustration. Then imagine their awe as God's plan is revealed.

This episode raises important questions for us. Have you ever been frustrated as God slammed one door after another, only to open an unexpected door? Recall what happened to you and how you felt.

Acts shows us that the Holy Spirit is always at work in the Church, and should remind us that the Holy Spirit is also at work in our lives.

Henry Barclay Swete, a wonderful 19th Century Anglican scholar, says we must remember that the Church "is *the house of God, the congregation of the living*

God, pillar and basement of the truth. ... The officers of a spiritual body are charged with spiritual work, and need spiritual power to do it.”

Our study continues Thursday at 6 p.m. on Zoom and in-person in the parish hall. Myself and Patricia Jennings will be looking for you.

Grace and peace,

Fr. Dion