

Hello everyone

We are used to thinking of Paul as always on the road. Our Bible even has maps of his three journeys- all neatly drawn out for us as he trails round to the ends of the earth spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, son of God.

On his so called second journey Paul moves off from Philippi through Thessalonica to Athens for awhile before he moves onto Ephesus where we found him in our reading from Acts this morning. We know all these places not just as holiday destinations for some, but because these are the cities Paul returned to in his thoughts time and time again and these are the places who received the letters which now for part of our New Testament and give us an insight into how the early church may have developed.

What we find is that Paul comes across a range of ways that the early church could have developed. There were different ways of seeing Jesus around. Maybe it seems amazing that God guided the church using social and cultural triggers through the spirit to the orthodox version of Christianity we have today.

As we read Paul's letters and Luke's version of his journeys in the book of Acts, we should remember that it was not always plain sailing for Paul. He had little time to spend in a deckchair by a pool reading his books and waiting to be fed.

Just a quick comparison between Paul's letters and the book of James shows us there were different definitions and balances between faith and work in operation back in the early church.

When Paul gets to Ephesus he meets some people who Luke calls disciples. You probably heard that word disciples and gave it little thought. You may even have supplied the name Jesus as you heard it read. Surely these were followers of Jesus, but Paul finds himself wondering about who these people were disciple of. It nags away at him urging him to ask these disciples questions as he clarifies his idea of just what they know of Jesus.

Luke doesn't mention what raised Paul's suspicions that something wasn't quite right, but something does prompt Paul to ask questions about the Holy Spirit and baptism.

Paul decides these disciples are learning about Jesus and in particular need help to understand something of how the Holy spirit is given at your baptism and then works with you through the gifts of the spirit your whole life. But you need to know what your gifts are.

It makes me wonder what questions Paul would ask us about the Holy Spirit?

Paul lists the gifts and fruits of the spirit in his letters to the church at Corinth and Galatia.

And he reminds us just as he did the people at Ephesus that we have been given gifts unique to us.

What gift has he given you?

Do you know?

Are you using it but keeping quiet about it?

Have you overlooked a gift you've been given. Is there still one to be unpacked.

Maybe one left under a tree or at the back of a drawer because you weren't quite sure just how wonderful the gift was?

And that wonderful unique gift was meant just for you.

Paul reminds us that the Holy spirit has given all Christians gifts and so God has picked out a gift for each of us to unwrap and enjoy using.

Because using the gifts God has given us makes us feel good and the more we use it the greater the sense we get of what God wants us to do.

It's true that the Holy Spirit comes into our lives only once at our baptism, but God can and does fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit time and time again in our lives. God comes in power to empower his people, one writer says.

That's the message Paul had for the people at Ephesus and God enables us through the Holy Spirit.

It's the same message we are still given today.

All we need to do is to continue unpacking the gifts God has given us and enjoy using them for God's glory.

So take time this week, sit down, consider the gifts you have been given to help God with his work each and every day and feel his presence with you.

Peace be with you

Amen