

I. Introduction

Good morning! Karen and I had a good trip to the USA to visit my son. And, last weekend, we were also blessed to be at the All Nations Returnees Conference (ANRC) in Shizuoka Prefecture. But it is good to be home in Osaka with all of you. I trust that the Lord has been watching over you all.

Today, we will be talking about faithfulness and especially about being faithful to fulfill the calling that the Lord has given us. **1 Corinthians 4:2** says, **“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”** Paul wrote these words to the church at Corinth, but these words apply to all of us as well. We have each been given a trust from the Lord, and it is good and right that we should be faithful in our trust. But, what is a trust? Well, the word can mean various things, but in this case a trust is like a stewardship. This stewardship consists of the time, resources, skills, and gifts that God has given to each of us, plus the purpose which God has called us to fulfill in His Kingdom. In our stewardship or trust, we are each accountable to the Lord to use the things He has entrusted to us for His purposes. In short, we are challenged to continually ask ourselves, “Are we using the time, treasure, and talent God has given us according to His will?”



Some callings are universal to all Christians. For example, God desires for all of His people to be loving, compassionate, merciful, kind, generous, peaceful, faithful, pure, and holy. The ANRC conference Karen and I just attended focused on one of these areas under the theme, *“Responding to God’s calling as a vessel of compassion.”* Messages and sharing times were focused on how we can develop our hearts to be more like God’s heart in showing compassion to others. By the way, the conference talks are available on ustream at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/anrc-2012>, so you can take a look if you are interested.



Some callings are universal, but God also gives specific callings to individuals and sometimes to organizations and churches as well. In today’s message we will see how God placed a specific calling on the lives of Barnabas and Paul for pioneer mission work and as we continue in Acts we will learn more and more how they were faithful to God’s call.

In response to the Lord’s call, Paul and Barnabas set out on a missionary journey lasting about two years. This journey took them first to the island of Cyprus, where, as shown by this painting at the Stavrovouni Monastery, they are still honored as the founders of the local church. Let’s read Acts 13:1-3.



II. Scripture Reading

1 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. 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." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. 4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. 6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at

Elymas and said, 10 "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. 13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

III. Teaching

Many followers of Jesus had gathered in Antioch after persecution broke out in Jerusalem. Throughout Israel and the Roman Empire, the persecution continued sporadically for many years. And, according to church tradition, the church in Antioch met secretly in this cave (see photo) to hide from the persecution. Later, this place became known as Saint Peter's Grotto Church and they still hold worship services there today. Now, the beginning of Acts 13 tells us that five men, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul were praying and fasting, and it is quite possibly that they were meeting in this same cave at that time.



The Holy Spirit responded to their prayers in **Acts 13:2**, **"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.'**" Some people make the mistake of thinking the Holy Spirit is an abstract power - sort of like, "the force," in Star Wars. But as we see here, the Holy Spirit is a person. The Spirit listened to their prayers, spoke to them, and directed their steps. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equally God and each is a person; they each listen, speak, decide, act, and feel. And yet, because they are one in essence and are in perfect unity, there is only one God. This is the mystery of the Trinity of God, revealed in the Scriptures and taught in true Christian churches since the early days of the church.

Now the Spirit directs that Barnabas and Saul be set apart for the work to which God has called them. The general nature of this call was revealed back in **Acts 9:15**, where we read, **"But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.'**" Here, the Lord revealed that Saul was to be transformed from a persecutor of Christians to a bold preacher proclaiming the Name of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire.

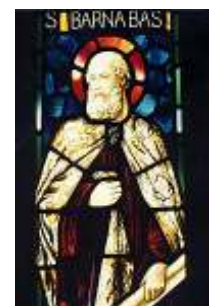
Ananias had, no doubt, shared the Lord's message about Saul's special calling with the rest of the disciples, but the time had not been right until now. But at the time of Acts 13, the waiting is over, the time is right, and Barnabas and Paul are sent out together. **Acts 13:3**, **"So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."**



After the laying on of hands and prayer, they were sent off. But to where? **Acts 13:4** tells us. **"The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus."** They were sent to the island of Cyprus. This is fascinating to me. Why? Because Cyprus is where Barnabas was born. Later on Paul will become more prominent, but at this point Barnabas was the leader. And God, through His Holy Spirit, sent Barnabas home.



Take a look at **Acts 4:36** for a moment. It reads, **"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement)."** When he left Cyprus, this man was Joseph the Levite, a Jew from a tribe of priests, probably going to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. But now he is returning to his home island as Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, a faithful follower of Jesus. We aren't told if they actually went to Barnabas' home, perhaps his parents had moved away. But there is something very powerful in going back to the place where you were born to share the Good News of Jesus.



Sharing the gospel at home should be a priority, because we love our families and friends and we want them to experience the love of Jesus. Many who are called to minister will be called first of all to minister at home - to their own family, to their friends, to the people they have known since childhood. There is a special power in the testimony of a person who brings Jesus into their home. We can't fool our families or our old childhood friends, at least not for very long. They will soon know whether knowing Jesus has really changed us or not, because they know who we were before we became Christians. This makes taking the gospel home a little scary, but it also makes our testimony powerful and effective.



Have you taken the Good News of Jesus home to your family and friends? If you haven't taken that step of faith yet, then I want to encourage you to be bold and do it. Pray for the Lord to give you a good opportunity and wise words to talk to the people close to your heart about Jesus. And then boldly step through the door that opens before you. It takes courage, but trust in the Lord and He will bless you and your loved ones.

From Antioch, Barnabas and Saul travelled down the Orontes River to Seleucia. There they caught a ship to Cyprus, landing on the east side of the island at the town of Salamis. In Salamis, they preached the Good News of Jesus in the Jewish synagogues, and then they travelled across the island to Paphos. Cyprus is about half the size of Shikoku, so this journey would have taken some days.



Acts 13:6-8, "They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith."



Sergius Paulus was the Roman ruler of the island, with the title of proconsul. The reports of the vigorous teaching of Barnabas and Saul had reached his ears and he wanted to hear their message personally. This was a good opportunity for the gospel to spread throughout the island, so it should not surprise us that an opponent arose. The name of the opponent was Elymas the sorcerer, who was also named Bar-Jesus. Bar-Jesus means, "son of Jesus," but we should remember that Jesus was a common name; this Bar-Jesus has no connection to the Jesus we know. This sorcerer was opposed to the faith and he tried to prevent the proconsul from hearing and understanding the Good News of Jesus.

Acts 13:9-10, "Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"

There is a time to patiently endure opposition and there is a time to speak against those who prevent others from hearing about Jesus. We need the leading of the Holy Spirit to know when it is time to remain silent and when to speak. Here, Saul is filled with the Spirit and the Spirit leads him to bring a bold rebuke against the sorcerer.

Acts 13:11, "Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand."



The blindness is not to be permanent, it is temporary. But it is effective in silencing the sorcerer and we can imagine that perhaps this experience might even have brought the sorcerer to repentance and eventually to faith in Jesus and salvation. We do know for sure that this demonstration of

the power of God had a powerful effect on those who saw it.

Acts 13:12 “When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.” Proconsul Sergius Paulos, the Roman ruler of Cyprus, heard the testimony of Saul concerning Jesus, saw the power of God, and believed. Notice that his name is, “Paulos.” Paulos was another common form of the name Paul. In Acts, after this, Saul is generally called Paul instead of Saul. The details behind this change are not explained. Some say that the proconsul gave Saul the name Paul, but it is also possible that Saul used both names from before this, using the name Saul among the Jews and Paul among the Greek-speaking gentiles. However, now that Saul has launched fully into his ministry to the gentiles, he is called Paul from this time forward. The change reflects Paul’s commitment to ministry to the gentiles and it also serves to remind people of the conversion of the proconsul, commemorating that event.

The ministry of Barnabas and Paul in Cyprus, including the conversion of the proconsul, had a profound effect on the people of this island. Still today, 80% of the population of Cyprus is Christian and the island is dotted with large, beautiful churches. This photo shows the Saint Georges Chapel in Paphos, a popular place for weddings.



IV. Conclusion

All Christians are called to a life of faith and service, to fellowship with other believers, to sharing the Good News of Jesus, and to the cultivation of the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. We are all called to be lights shining in the places where we live and work, faithfully carrying out the daily tasks that are before us so that the Name of Christ might be honored by all.



Some of us are also called to more specific ministries or service. In **Acts 13:2**, we read, “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.’” Specific calls like this are still common today. Most missionaries, including Karen and myself, have a strong and specific call from the Holy Spirit. I also received a further call, through OIC, to be ordained as pastor.

Before we close today’s message, I would like to challenge all of us to examine ourselves and our walk before the Lord. Let’s each ask ourselves, “Am I faithfully fulfilling the callings the Lord has placed on my life?” “Am I open and listening, ready to hear the voice of the Lord anytime that He desires to call me to new work or ministry?”



Our salvation is a gift from the Lord, given by grace and received by faith. We are not saved by works, not even the work of faithfully responding to the callings the Lord has given us. But it is good and right to serve the Lord and to obey Him in all things. That is why we call Him Lord. And many Christians find that they cannot enjoy peace in their heart until they respond to all that God has called them to. Faithful service in the ministries the Lord calls us into is very important for His Kingdom and for our joy as Christians. In prayer and in discussion with trustworthy brothers and sisters, listen for God’s call on your life and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Let’s pray.



V. Prayer