

Acts 20:1-12
Feilding Baptist
4th May 2025

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

I certainly want you to be encouraged in your faith by being here this morning. Paul encourages the people he encounters as we'll see shortly in Acts 20. Jesus also wanted to encourage people. Here are the words of Jesus from John 16:33

New International Version - UK

33 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'

How is it encouraging to know we'll still have troubles in the world?! Because says Jesus, He has overcome the world. Jesus has had victory, and we can too as we walk with Jesus.

Let's pray;

Father God, thank you for this time to gather, to be together, to worship together. Thank you for the times we've had this week to worship on our own, please help us Holy Spirit, to be grateful for this gathered time.

We come, not free from troubles, but in the awareness that troubles are temporary, that Jesus has overcome every trouble we can think of. And so, Lord Jesus, we thank you for all that you've done for us, from giving us the opportunity to be free of troubles, from darkness, from evil, from death.

Father, please may this be a very encouraging time as we worship, and as we fellowship over lunch. Please bless this time and this space, in Jesus' mighty name we pray, Amen.

Message – Distractions/Responding to the Dark Side

When we as individuals, or as a church, encounter the forces of darkness, we must keep going, shining brightly for Jesus in the midst of the trouble.

When a river meets the sea, it is called the river (what?) If you sail up a coast line and come to a harbour, you'll be at the harbour (what?) If you happened to be at the entrance to the 21 kilometre Otago Harbour, formed from a rather large volcano, and you sailed up the harbour, leaving those dreadful squawking seagulls behind you, you would arrive at, what, the harbour throat?

No, in Dunedin you would have arrived at Portsmouth Drive, a double laned highway at the head of the harbour. And in the middle of these four lanes, is a lovely green grass median. And two very sizeable gum trees.

Now, in 2011, 20 or so three to four metre gum trees were planted in this grass median. We were living there then, and they looked fantastic! Someone's vision of what it could look like in 20, 30, 50 years time was

commendable. But one dark stormy night, 14 of these trees succumbed to a gross act of vandalism. They were snapped beyond repair.

The rationale for the attack was bemusing, and confusing. There were not residents' view to block. The whole area is commercial, there are no residences there. If you drive Portsmouth Drive now, you'll see what? Only the original two trees. All the new ones are gone. Darkness won. The vandals won.

In these dozen verses at the start of Acts 20, there are three times where darkness steps in and tries to win. But Paul doesn't cave in. He knows what he is to be about. And he continues on with power, conviction, and determination. I have found this very encouraging. And I hope you will too. Let's read;

Acts 20:1-12 New International Version - UK

Through Macedonia and Greece

1 When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. 2 He travelled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, 3 where he stayed three months. Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. 5 These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. 6 But we sailed from Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

Eutychus raised from the dead at Troas

7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. 8 There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. 9 Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third storey and was picked up dead. 10 Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms round him. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'He's alive!' 11 Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. 12 The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

Did you see the references to bread and light? Remember Jesus' 'I am' statements, I am the light of the world (John 8:12), I am the bread of life (John 6:35). Luke is reminding us of Jesus' presence, not absence in the midst of these trials.

The first trial was the uproar that we looked at last week. Demetrius wound up his workers, who wound up the town. Followers of Jesus were being got at, picked on. But, we read in our first verse, Paul encouraged them, before leaving.

It's not hard to have the impression that Paul was always on the move, always travelling. This was his third missionary journey. But he had been in Ephesus a while... Oh, how long is a 'while'? Five minutes, five

months, five years? None of these? On Paul's third missionary journey Paul stayed in Ephesus three years. And at the end of that time, was this riot or uproar. And the time to move on.

Now over the next six verses are all these place names, check them out on a map, hopefully in order; 1. Ephesus, 2 Macedonia, 3 Greece, 4 Syria, 2 Macedonia, 5 Berea, 6 Thessalonica, 7 Derbe, 8 Asia, 9 Troas, 10 Philippi, 9 Troas. Paul has gone on missionary journeys, made disciples, who have now joined him as missionaries. It's become like a travelling church! What a powerful group!

As well as telling people about Jesus, the purpose of Paul's third journey was to raise some cash for the struggling Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. For the Old Testament Jews would have nothing to do with them or their businesses. Paul was taking up an offering. And it is likely that Paul was thinking that Passover would be a good time to be there. Or, he was thinking that there were many extra ferries put on at that time for all the Jewish pilgrims who were heading to Jerusalem for Passover. Easy to get a ticket at that time of the year. And it would save a very long walk.

But we read in v3 that just as Paul was about to sail. some Jews were plotting against him. It is likely that they knew he was sailing, and recognised an opportunity. This wasn't to take him to court, but to end his life. To have Paul on their boat, with many other Jewish pilgrims, would be an opportunity for a lynching. And toss the evidence overboard. Paul though recognised that it wasn't going to be the smartest thing to do to sail back. So he changed tact (note the pun) and walked instead.

Evil and darkness again tried to get in the way of God's plans. But again, evil didn't win, because Paul took the opportunity to encourage the new churches along the way.

I find this fascinating. Paul was so clear on what he wanted to achieve for Jesus, that the change in plans didn't matter. He was so clear in his purpose, his calling, and his philosophy of mission and ministry, that going a different way didn't matter. Preach the good news about Jesus, and encourage and strengthen the churches.

This reminds me of Jesus' commission at the end of Matthew, that we'll get to one day (in our Matthew series), maybe next year? What does Jesus say?

Matthew 28:19-20

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

We know this so well. But do we know that there is a comma at the end of verse 19? Jesus hasn't finished, this is the middle of the sentence.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

And teaching them... Paul isn't a travelling road show. Remember he stayed in Ephesus three years. Paul proclaims the good news about Jesus, and stays and teaches, and makes sure that people get the message. He teaches. He encourages. He strengthens.

So evil and darkness tried another distraction. Paul and the others are now in Troas. What are they about to do? Remember Jesus, by having communion. Evil tries to disrupt.

We read that due to Paul's sustained preaching, a young man, most likely aged between eight and 14, fell from the window and died. Now, as a preacher I want to come to the defence of Paul! Yes, he preached from sunset to midnight, and gave part B from midnight to sunrise. But the Greek word for a monologue speech, one person speaking non stop, is missing. Instead we have the Greek word for discussion. Paul wasn't speaking non stop.

Secondly, there is an undercurrent of thinking that the boy fell from the window and just winded himself. We need to jump to the defence of the writer here. Who wrote Acts? And what did Luke do for a job? And so if a doctor said that the boy was dead, then we must be confident that indeed he was! The fully dead boy is raised to life in the same way as Elija and Elisha did in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:19-23; 2Kings 4:32-4). How would this have encouraged the people?!

So instead of being distracted, they are strengthened and encouraged. They go back inside, and break bread, they remember Jesus! What a communion service this must have been! Imagine their emotions! How would the boy's parents be feeling?

For the third time darkness tries to distract Paul. For the third time Paul is not distracted, but continues. Jesus is remembered in the breaking of bread. Jesus isn't forgotten, nor were they distracted from doing this.

Before we move to our own breaking of bread, consider verse eight. This verse encouraged me. I'm not sure it was just recording that there were lots of lamps that would have produced lots of fumes, and therefore drowsiness? I believe this verse was to encourage us, that there were many expressions of Jesus, followers of Jesus in that room. Lights for the world. May that be so for us too, each time we gather, may there be many lamps in our room.

Despite the forces of darkness, may we keep shining brightly for Jesus in the midst of our trouble.