

'The Spirit spoke'

Acts 8:26-40.

Fifth Sunday of Easter, April 29th.

In my last year of uni, I and the Christian student leadership believed God was calling me to serve for a year or two as a Christian student worker. It just seemed right, peace when praying, vision for the role, fitted my skills and experience. Yet after the interview, I was turned down.

Shocked I was.

The leadership offered to meet up with me on a Monday evening, to pray with me about what had happened. While they were praying, one of them - Cathy - had a vision. She saw me in a room. With a number of doors behind me. I was on a chair. As I heard a door open I'd turn around but before i could see which door it was, it had shut. She felt God was saying - that before me there were many options, but he would put a big flashing arrow by the door he wanted me to go through. Encouraging. Totally. But what when how?

I went back my room - final exams beckoned - and as soon as I walked through that door, two letters - OM shot into my mind. I groaned. I knew what they meant - Operation Mobilisation - a missionary organisation working in different parts of the world. I groaned for we'd had one of their speakers on a teaching weekend and he had done so so. Those letters never left my brain the following 6 weeks. I shared it with a friend and he prayed about it and we chatted about it. And I decided to contact OM and a few months later i was working with them in Hungary. A very special and significant part of my Christian life.



That is story one. Second one is from my final year in OM. A friend had suggested that I consider being ordained in the Church of England. Now I had a number of issues with that. But during the next 9 months, I read things I learned things, that showed I was wrong in many ideas. I had a sense that God was inviting me to take the next step - contacting the Diocese to talk about a calling to be ordained. Yet I asked the Lord to confirm one more time, to speak. I was going to attend a conference and I asked him to speak during it. Amazing how God in his grace meets us in our need.

I arrived late for the conference opening meeting. I expected during that week the main speaker - big name from USA would say - we need pastors in the church. I sat down. A bishop was doing the welcome and opening bible talk. He read the passage from Matthew 9 -

³⁷ Then he [Jesus] said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

That passage of scripture just hit me - here - as if I was the only person in the room - hit me deep in my spirit - I knew God had answered my prayer and a week or two later I wrote to the Diocese...

Philip in Acts 8 has an angel speak to him, and then later the Spirit speaks. A successful ministry is interrupted and he is not told everything that will happen but only told the next step or two he is to take. Acts shows a Spirit filled and a Spirit led community, a community where the followers of Jesus are open to God speaking by his Spirit in many ways. Is this experience of Philip unique? I'd suggest that as we consider Acts, we learn some of the ways the Lord can speak to us as a church or individually.

Let us have a quick journey through parts of Acts...

Begin on Pentecost. **Acts 2:v16-21.**

When the Spirit is poured out on Pentecost. Joel is quoted which describes a prophetic church – sons and daughters, young and old, servants – all types and all sorts – to experience God speaking. And as Peter goes on to say, after his sermon:

“Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,. The Promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Spirit for all and the assumption is prophecy is one of the gifts the Lord will want to release among Christians, whether young or old, male or female, employer or employed! There will be visions. There will be dreams. So it is not a renewed phenomenon, for a temporary time, but potentially available to all, since all now possessed the Spirit .

Philip has gone to Samaria and then we read in **chapter 8: v26-30.**

There is an angel who speaks. But then as he sees the chariot – ‘the Spirit told Philip: go to that chariot and stay near it.’ There is an openness to the voice of the Lord – no indication of him being in prayer in a traditional sense, but he was open. And he hears and he obeys – he is available to the voice, he obeys the voice and he is humble I’d suggest for he maybe wasn’t sure what would happen – all it say: go the chariot, stay near it – we see evangelism, but Philip didn’t know what was going on. Here the voice leads to an opportunity and he seizes it. So prophecy and evangelism – not just for building up of the church and its members but also to help share the Christian faith...

Acts 9: Saul is converted. Then in Damascus – I find it striking in all the news of 5 years in war, and we look at our Acts how much is connected to Syria. Damascus – Ananias : 9:v10-19.

He has a vision – a conversation about the Lord. And we see how he obeys the word after debate. A difficult, dangerous word ... But a word that helps a new fellow believer. He lays his hands on Saul, prays for him to be filled with the Spirit and for him to be healed.

Acts 10:1-20. we have another vision – but a different type – for Peter, with animals and a much briefer conversation with the Lord. Acts 10:9-17 – and then when the men come to the door, the Spirit speaks in a different way. So not another vision but in another means the Spirit speaks. It is a chapter which seems to suggest that God remains sovereign over the ways he uses – we have an angel to Cornelius, the vision to Peter, the voice / heavy thought to go with the representatives. It is a vision of course and a voice which has both ramification for the early church and also it is again evangelistic – to go to someone, and then Peter seizes the opportunity and preaches.

Acts 13: 1-4. In Antioch we have Prophets and teachers. Possibly seeing more of the ministry as stated in Ephesians 4: apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers and later, we hear of an evangelist. While worshipping and fasting the Holy Spirit says "set apart". A hard word for the church – to give up their two most senior leaders – there is obedience. It may have seen illogical but the Lord had a plan...

Acts 16:6-10. Theologian FF Bruce:

“Paul’s missionary journeys display an extraordinary combination of strategic planning and keen sensitiveness to the guidance of the Spirit of God however that guidance was conveyed – by prophetic utterance, inward prompting or overruling of external circumstances.” (Bruce, Acts, p306).

We do not know how the Spirit stops them – was it a picture, was it a vision, was it a thought that lingered and wouldn't leave, , was it a feeling, dis-ease, was it a dream. But twice they know and they are brought to the place. Then Paul has the vision of the Macedonian man. Again we see they conclude God has spoke – there is discernment and then obedience. A new direction is revealed...

FF Bruce adds: “The Spirit’s interventions did not frustrate Paul’s strategy, but enhanced its effectiveness.” (Acts, Bruce, p.308).

Acts 18:9-17.

Paul has experienced persecution in nearly every city since they came to Europe. Perhaps he was getting worn down. But, while in Corinth, v9- the Lord speaks – "keep on speaking... no one to attack or harm." So amazing word from the Lord to build, to strengthen, to comfort, to encourage Paul. But he is attacked – it seems – but the word is fulfilled as we see the procounsel protects

Paul. Note how Paul could have been encouraged by the Lord in a word from the psalms for example? Here was a man who knew the Scriptures. Yet despite his great biblical knowledge, he receives a vision...

FF Bruce: “he received one of the visions which came to him at critical junctures in his life, heartening him for whatever might lie ahead.” (See Acts 23:11 and 27:23-24), (Acts, Bruce, p350).

And in our final passage, we return to Philip. He is in Caesarea, where we had left him at the end of our Acts reading. Now. **Acts 21:7-14** – Philip: has 4 daughters who prophesied – prophetesses. And suggesting, that roughly 24 years later, when this meeting happens. the Spirit is speaking to individuals but also he is raising up people called to be prophets.

So: I suggest, we see in Acts, a prophetic church.

Individuals who are not prophets but who hear the voice of God. Some words are for them personally, some are for evangelism, some are for others, and so affect the life of the church.

Also we have prophets and prophetesses, those with calling and gifting in this particular area. As you have pastors, you have prophets.

When we consider what it means to be a Spirit filled, Spirit shaped, Spirit led community, openness to the Lord speaking through Scripture and through other means is part of what He seeks to grow within us.

To finish. I remember a service I attended and I went to be prayed for. I actually went to have prayer for another reason but this person also prayed that my ears would be open to hear God's speaking. Perhaps for some of us, the first step in this journey is

being open, and asking the Lord to open our ears so we too can hear and recognise when he speaks to us, in whatever means he chooses to use. And our prayer ministry team may be one way of making that step .

Shall we pray...