

Southside Uniting Church

Online Worship



Collect

God of Grace,
Your children come before You;
We seek to hear Your Voice,
To experience Your presence,
To understand Your Ways.
As you called that first council together
In Jerusalem so long ago –
So you continue to call us still;
To find Your clarity in our confusion,
To hear Your direction when find ourselves lost,
So as we gather as Your community at this time
Lord, speak to us and guide us!
Amen.

GOD INTERRUPTS!

We Listen

Join our Online Worship at
[www.ssuc.org.au/online-worship-](http://www.ssuc.org.au/online-worship-services)
services available 9 am on Sunday, May
2. Families with children are
encouraged to use family faith
materials Ps Richard Moors has made

Prayers for Others

Father we pray for those who are isolated today.
Those who are without a community,
Those who do not know fellowship and camaraderie,
Those who for reasons unknown;
Remove themselves from the company of others.
God, where people desire privacy; hear their prayers –
But where isolation is thrust on them,
Create avenues for Your Love to find its way to them.
Through the hearts and works of Your children,
Through the efforts of social justice programmes,
Through the collective pathos of humanity,
Let us not neglect or overlook anyone;
Let us not deny them the care they deserve.
Instead let us celebrate the dignity of all people,
The varied tapestry of individuals that make up society.
And use us, Lord God, to express Your Love
May we be instruments of Your Peace
In Christ our Lord
Amen

Acts 15:1-17

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers:

"Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ²This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

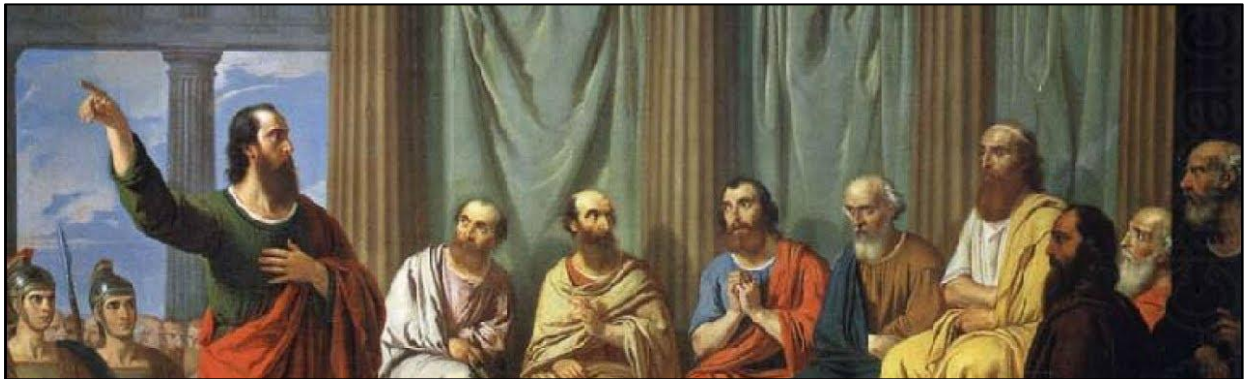
⁶The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from

my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

¹²The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me. ¹⁴Simon^[a] has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶"'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things'
[Amos 9:11-12]

Council of Humankind



What do we see in Acts 15? In many respects it is the culmination of church's experience in Acts up until now. We saw the church's heart for the poor when Peter and John said "Silver and Gold I do not have..." (Acts 3:6), the church's heart for social justice when the community asked the church to look after the neglected widows and orphans who were receiving the food ration (Acts 6:1) and here we see the church take on what is its next recognisable feature for us... they had a meeting (!)

For some of us, that is what church is mostly about, a torrent of meetings to talk about all manner of things pertaining to the community – meetings about property, about finances, about how long the sermons are (sometimes about how short they are too) and like this one, a meeting about outreach.

"Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith." vv. 7-9

Paul and Barnabas had been appointed by the church at Antioch to challenge the idea that believers need to conform to a Jewish model of life. So they come to this meeting where the conflicting factions of the church are able to hear out the arguments. One of the great arguments for this is not attested to by Luke (author of Acts) but we know it from Paul's letters to the churches – that is the teaching that all men committed to the faith should be circumcised, living out the covenant with Abraham we see in the Genesis.

But hear Paul's rebuke to this teaching in Acts:

"...Why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?"

For Paul, the Abrahamic covenant and the Law of Moses were vestiges of a system that precluded the most important aspect of faith in God – grace. Now, while we can say this about the Early Church, I wonder if we can say this about ourselves today also? We are excited about the mission of Southside, but with this excitement there must also come a recognition that our mission is not turn people in Christians like us... rather we are to shine the light of Christ in order that they may see their hearts purified by Holy Spirit.

Paul recognised that the Gentile Christians would not become like the Jewish believers of the time. They *could not* embrace all these components of Judaism that were cultural and connected with the Hebrew identity of God's people. However, they could embrace God's call and faith in their own ways, expressing faith in the same God that accepted them and sent His Son to die for them also. Ergo, the kind of faith they would express would have to have a clear Gentile expression about it.

This is the faith that would eventually become the Christianity we exhibit today in most of the world. We are not Messianic Jews, nor the God-Fearers who wanted to learn about Judaism but we excluded from much of it. Instead, we are a different expression of the same faith – the next step in God's narrative of embrace and inclusion. In Romans 4, we see that Paul treats Abraham's circumcision not as the proof of his faithfulness but as an outworking of the faith that birthed what would become Judaism:

Under what circumstances was [Abraham's faith] credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Romans 4:10-11

So it should be in our mission – we are not to look for those people who are already like us, but those who are ready to embrace the Gospel and take it into the next level. So they may find their own mission eventually and connect with the same God at work with us, with Paul, even with Abraham.

Grace and Peace

Rev. Esteban Liévano