

TFTD A34: God's Sat-Nav

Good morning everyone! Welcome to the 1st of June. Another beautiful sunny morning a new phase for some of us as the lockdown starts to ease, but for most of us it's a case of keeping on keeping on. In the words of the old Methodist hymn, "We'll thank Him for all that is past, and trust Him for all that's to come". After celebrating Pentecost yesterday, our readings through June take us back to Paul's story in Acts. This is the point where the travels seriously begin ... Today's TFTD from Pam Butler takes us to Philippi: Acts 16.1-23

How good are your navigational skills? It is no exaggeration to say that the navigational skills of my mum were, and those of my eldest daughter and myself are, at best non-existent and at worst negative. That is to say that our natural instinct would send us in exactly the opposite direction to the one we need. A case in point is how my mum got totally lost coming back from the loo at my daughter's graduation! We had to send out a search party.

Now you may think that the use of a Sat-Nav on road journeys would solve my problem and bring my stress levels down from the ceiling. Generally it does deliver me at my destination but not always! One evening in winter I set the Sat-Nav to a place we were considering for the reception at my daughter's wedding. Being very obedient I followed every instruction issued by the device. I was therefore somewhat confused as to why the road came to an abrupt halt at the gate of a farm and the only thing marked on a sign-post was a footpath. Now if there is one thing that comes close to being as bad as my navigational skills it is reversing a car down a single-track lane in the dark. I will leave you to imagine how pleased I was to eventually reach my destination

Plainly the passage from Acts chapter 16 is not about how to get to a particular geographic location but it is about aligning ourselves with God's direction and that is not always easy. Some might say that if we are a Christian we must know what God wants us to do. Now that may be true of the way we live our lives from day to day but it is often nothing like as clear when it comes to a particular role God wants us to take up for the furtherance of his Kingdom.

As we know God intervened in Paul's life in very dramatic, challenging and life changing ways. At times he really must have wondered why God placed so much trust in him especially considering the way he had previously treated followers of Jesus. Paul was a fervent Christian with a real desire to serve God and God knew that.

Sometimes we are fervent and eager to do things to further God's mission as we see it. The key words here are 'as we see it'. We take it into our heads that we will do something that we are sure will further the Kingdom and please God. There may be absolutely nothing wrong with what we decide to do except that we divert time and other resources away from what God had planned. As a result, opportunities are missed or delayed.

Myself included, we are not generally fans of failure, or at least don't enjoy what it feels like to fail. We thrive on success and success breeds success. If we are honest, our pride takes a hit when we fail and we hide away licking our wounds but we do failure a disservice if we ignore what it has to teach us. Failure can be a stepping-stone to future success and possibly a necessary step along the way.

How does it make you feel if I say that what is on God's mind is not success but obedience? His primary call on our lives is one of obedience, to follow where he leads. What if I add to that that some of the things God calls us to do will bring no glory to us at the time might and we appear to have achieved nothing? That upsets our success-driven culture. God might call us to a reconciling role or a challenging role that makes us public enemy no.1 . We might be called to seemingly insignificant roles that we can't see the point of doing.

Years ahead folks may look back in hindsight and see how pivotal our role had been, that it was the firm foundation that was needed and as such one of the most important roles.

This is all well and good, you may say, but how on earth do we know what God wants us to do?

There is no simple answer to that. Occasionally his call can be so loud or persistent that we lose that sense of inner peace until we respond to it. My own call to ministry came in that manner, no matter how much I tried to tell God I was totally incapable of standing up and preaching and indeed really didn't want to

preach. Even given all my protests that call would not go away and with the discernment of the Methodist Church I was eventually ordained.

Something to remind ourselves of is that God is not necessarily looking for someone who has all the necessary gifts and graces but someone who is prepared to work alongside God trusting that God knows what he is doing and will enable them along the way.

Perhaps more often we collectively discern God's will by prayerfully bringing together several factors that all appear to point in a particular direction.

Finally: one of the greatest gifts is the gift of encouragement, keeping someone going when the going gets tough and Paul was a master at that.

Lead me, Lord, lead me in your righteousness: make your way plain before my face. When I am baffled and the way seems dark, help me to go on believing in your love: and when the path of reason is darkened, let the light of faith shine in my heart. Amen.