



I speak your language: Acts 21.27-40

Today's TFTD is from Robin (no prizes for guessing that!) with a picture of the beach at Patara ...



Marian and I had been living in Turkey for just over two years when we went on a trip to Patara. Patara is an ancient city that now lies in ruins on a beautiful golden beach fairly near Kas. In those days it was quite tricky to get there. We were travelling with two friends from Manchester who were over for a holiday and we caught a minibus from Kas.

The minibus was full of young tourists from Germany and Belgium. Just before we got to the ruins themselves we stopped at the tourist police hut. Uniformed tourist police boarded the minibus to collect the entrance fee.

There was always a notice up at the tourism police huts stating what the entrance fee was and this one was no different.

'Entrance 10,000 Turkish Lira' is what it said in English, Turkish, French and German. And then underneath in Turkish only; 'Entrance for students, retired persons, employees, unemployed, self-employed and members of the military: 1,000 Turkish Lira'. I had already tried in the past at other tourist attractions to claim this massively reduced rate for anybody who can read a sign in Turkish but without any success. You pay the foreigner rate or you don't get in. This had always been the message.

I tapped one of the tourist police officers on the knee (this is a perfectly acceptable way in Turkey for one man to gain the attention of another man). 'Elder brother', I said, indicating Marian and our two friends who were sitting



with my infant son at the other end of the minibus, 'those people at the front are with me.'

'No problem,' said the officer.

He and his colleague collected the 10,000 Turkish Lira fees from the other foreign tourists and waved away the money my friend was offering, indicating in sign language that I was taking care of it. Then, to my surprise he also waved away the money I offered him, got off the minibus and shouted for the driver to drive on, slamming the door shut as he did so.

The Germans and Belgians looked at me curiously. 'What did you say to him?' they asked. I told them and it still didn't make sense. All we could conclude was that sometimes it really pays to learn another language.

Paul could as a minimum speak Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew and Latin. He used this astonishing ability to great effect to get himself out of yet another scrape, this time in Jerusalem. Once again, our passage today shows how Paul's linguistic abilities and his awareness of different cultures in the Eastern Mediterranean along with his many other talents made him the ideal person to be called as an apostle in the early church. What for other people were insurmountable barriers of language and culture, were for him no barrier at all as he effortlessly switched from one language to another and crossed from one culture to another.

The British are famous all over the world for not being very good at learning other languages. Which, in my experience, makes it even more worthwhile to learn a bit if you can, because the world will always need translators and interpreters, not just professional ones but people who can effortlessly explain one person to another so that communication and trade and understanding can all take place.

Even if you haven't learned a language other than English, you will have learned many other things because of your upbringing and life experiences that give you communication skills that may not be unique but may at least be unique within the church in Alderley Edge.

Maybe you are the person who is uniquely placed to act as the go-between between our church and the Conservative Association; our church and the Union Club; our church and the library volunteers; our church and the climate change protestors; our church and the farming community. Maybe you are



uniquely well placed to talk about faith in Jesus Christ to allotment holders or social workers or self-employed people or recovering alcoholics.

Reflecting on this may lead you to an understanding of what your special evangelistic calling might be. Paul was an astonishing evangelist. He made something really hard look really easy. But actually, for him, a lot of it was really easy. The church grows not by loading huge burdens on each other's backs but by finding what is very easy for each disciple.