

FAITH FOR THE FUTURE
PASSING THROUGH
ACTS 14.21-28

This winter was a tough one.
A lot of roads were torn up because of all the rain and snow.

At one time it didn't matter whether I came from the North or the South,
I couldn't get to my house without passing through big chunks of asphalt and rock.
In some places I could squeeze around the sides or move to the other side,
but for the most part, I couldn't get home without passing through a rough road.

And when I did, I had to slow down, got bounced around, and beat up.

Life is sometimes like that.
Today maybe the boss is making more demands on you at work,
or maybe you're out of work, or you can't get in the field,
or at school the teacher is on your case,
or your friends haven't acted much like friends lately.

There have been too many doctor appointments,
the kids are messed up, the bills are piling up, and you're ready to give up.
Your head aches, your heart aches, and your body groans.

Divorce, death, or doubt have you in a strangle hold.
You've got to make a tough decision,
it might even be a life or death decision.
You found it's tough to trust others, yourself, or even God.

Life has come to a screeching halt except it hasn't halted,
You've got to keep going, you've got to get through.

That was true for my friend Kelly.
Kelly was on the rough road.
Maybe it is better to say he had several things to overcome,
to get through in his life.

As a teenager one Sunday morning in church, he responded to an altar call.
He went forward, knelt, and prayed.
He got up feeling joyful.
He had God's promise that he was going "to get through."

Several folks came up to him afterwards,
smiled, shook his hand, and congratulated him.

But that was it, no follow up, no addition Bible Studies, no extra prayer time,
no pastor and no people visits, none, nada...
He was left on his own to work out his salvation with fear and trembling.
with not one wisp of an idea as how to do that.

What was he suppose to do?
How was he going, to get through?

Maybe you've experienced that too.
 Maybe that is the way many of you new members feel today.

Here you are, you have a lot to deal with already,
 there are more rough roads to come,
 you're joining the church today and asking , so what do I do now?

You're in good company.
 I think some of the members of those first churches might have felt that way as well.

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 Missionaries Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark
 went where no man of Christ had gone before,
 to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.
 They went to the island of Cyprus and some towns in what is now southern Turkey,

It would be like Aberdeen FUMC sending out missionaries,
 setting up churches in towns from here to Groton, Webster, Milbank,
 and etc all the way to Minneapolis and back.

Paul and Barnabas made many converts but were met with confrontation as well.
 In a town called Lystra, they were at first hailed and saluted as gods,
 then later stoned for their faith in God.

They finally reached Derby.
 Then turned around and headed back to their home church in Antioch in Syria.

And on the way home they stopped at some of the churches they had started.
 This time not to witness to the lost, but to work with the saved.

They stopped to engage, to encourage, to enable, and to entrust
 the members and the leaders of those churches
 so that they might persevere in their faith,
 even in the face of persecution,
 so that they would keep going, that they would get through.

Now how did they do that?
 It would be good for us to know,
 so that before or when we experience trials and tribulation,
 persecution and suffering, the "rough roads" of life
 we as individuals, we as community, we as the people of God,
 will get through and even, be better for it.

Our Scripture tells us what Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark did
 to help the early disciples to get through.

First, they **ENGAGED** the members of those churches,
 verses 21-22, **"Then they returned... strengthening the disciples...
 to go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God."**

The word for strengthen means "to give additional conviction to what is already there."
 In other words, to reinforce.

Paul and Barnabas added to the bits and pieces of truth that they had already taught the folks of these churches so that those people might deepen their roots of faith.

Remember the parable of the soils.
 Jesus said that there would be seed landing in shallow soil.
 It would grow alright.
 But when the scorching heat and hot winds came,
 the plant wouldn't be able to take it, it would wither and die.

What Jesus was saying about our faith is that when the scorching heat and hot winds of persecution come, if the roots of our faith aren't deep enough our faith in Jesus Christ will wither and die.

Marilyn Eberhart became a missionary to Indonesia twenty-seven years ago. She said that, "**engaging** others and trying to strengthen them in their faith was much easier then, than it is today.

She said that, "even though Indonesia was (and is) the largest Muslim country in the world, there was a time you could sit in the park, talk to your neighbor, visit with a family, and start sharing your testimony.

Now the political atmosphere in Indonesia has changed all of that. But friendship evangelism and prayers for healing are still the main means of engaging and strengthening others.

She said, "My friend Helmut plays sports or other games to create and continue relationships with people. My friend Esther uses physical therapy to do that And I teach English classes.

We used whatever opportunities God had given us, we added bits and pieces of God's teaching when opportunity presented itself.

First, we help people get through as we ENGAGE them.
 Second, to help people get through, we ENCOURAGE them.

That is what Paul and Barnabas did.
 Verse 22b, "**Then they returned...strengthening the disciples And encouraging them to remain true in their faith.**"

So too did Marilyn in her ministry.
 She writes, "listening, counseling, and caring, will open the door for leading someone to Christ as well as encourage others in their faith."

She added, "I had a woman that heard me pray for others on a daily basis. She talked to me about several personal problems, and I was able to strengthen and encourage her as she dealt with those problems, but I had never shared the gospel with her.

One day she approached me and asked, “Miss Marilyn, is that for me as well?
Can I pray to Jesus too?”

I think we can easily guess Marilyn’s answer.

Third, Paul and Barnabas not only ENGAGED AND ENCOURAGED those new to the faith to remain true in their faith, but they set up a structure that **ENABLED** the new believers to be stronger in their faith. Verses 23 says, **“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church...”**

To enable means to help provide opportunities and to teach so that people will themselves grow in faith.

Marilyn has been part of an organization and in her position as a teacher for 27 years. Because of that she has been able **to enable** many students to be strengthen and encouraged in their faith.

After Ibu Suminam accepted the Lord, she spent several weeks being disciplined by Marilyn.

Ibu especially wanted to learn how to pray. As a former Muslim, she had never prayed a prayer with her own words. Marilyn taught her to pray from the heart.

Kroliyus’s father was a witch doctor, who came to know the Lord, but he continued to practice witchcraft.

Marilyn disciplined both Kroliyus and his father, and his father finally gave up witchcraft. Then God used both of them to pray for healing and to disciple others.

Here at FUMC we try to provide many support groups, Bible Studies, Sunday School Classes, work opportunities, and mission options to **enable** you to be **strengthen and encouraged** in your faith.

And fourth, Paul and Barnabas **ENTRUSTED** the new disciples to God. Verse 23b, **“...with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord, in whom they put their trust.”**

Marilyn said this is the most difficult step She said, “we sent out our seminary students and church members to practice what they have learned.

Adieli had a gift to pray for healing. We entrusted him to God and trusted Adieli to share his gift with others.

Sylvia loved children and was able to reach them through a dynamic puppet ministry.”

Marilyn concludes, “I thoroughly enjoyed it when my students exceeded my own abilities and were successful in their ministries.

I’ll bet Paul and Barnabas felt the same way. I know Pastor Eldon, our staff, and I do as well.

Let me ask, do you believe, really believe that this business of engaging, encouraging, enabling, entrusting really works?

I want to tell you part of Grace's story.

Grace's parents divorced when she was 5 and she went into a foster home. actually several foster homes.

It is understandable she has longed for a home.

So in high school she was placed with a foster mom that was very caring and compassionate. She accepted Christ in the Lutheran church where her foster mother was a member.

Her foster mother continued to pray entrusting Grace to God, and to finding ways to encourage and enable Grace despite the fact Grace, like most teenagers began to rebel against all authority.

One good thing that happened to Grace just before she turned 18 was that she sought out, found, and was reconciled with her birth parents. But the rough road got rougher after that.

She married into an abusive relationship and began to study with the Jehovah Witnesses.

She and her husband had three children but eventually they divorced. eventually divorced, She has also divorced herself from the Jehovah Witnesses.

She ended up in other abusive relationships. But her foster mom reentered her life time and time again to strengthen and support her.

Grace always knew God was there for her. Her step mother, the church, and her new husband have helped her get through the rough roads. A few years ago in Karen Larson she found a friend and a new church home.

Karen encouraged Grace to try FUMC. She did, she came to a Lenten Service. She said when she walked in, she knew she was home.

This weekend she is away doing what she loves doing most, helping others get through the rough roads.

She is encouraging others with the same encouragement she herself has received from God.

Oh, one more thing that is helpful, Paul and Barnabas **ENJOYED** telling stories, telling stories of God's work in their lives. Verses 26-27, **"They sailed back to Antioch...gathered the church together And reported all that God had done through them And how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."**

Telling the story also strengthens and encourages us in our faith. It helps us get through and it helps us help others to get through.

Let us stand and rededicate ourselves to that very task as we sing the prayer, Take My Life and Let it Be, Consecrated Lord to Thee.