

**SERMON TITLE:** "Assembling The Team"

**TEXT:** Acts 13

**PREACHED AT:** Neighbourhood Church

**BY:** James Toews

**DATE:** August 30, 2009

Today we have a special celebration. We have formally brought some new “players” onto our team. Colin and Sarah Dyck are officially joining us to lead the Youth Ministry.

These are, of course, very exciting times. They are exciting for us because from the very beginning, when Janet and I came here 22 years ago, Neighbourhood Church has committed itself to invest in ministry to children and youth. We have poured our time and effort into this area because we believe that our children and youth are the stewardship God has given us.

We have also committed our resources into this area because this represents a very specific area of mission to our city.

There was a time when churches ran tent meetings as a way of reaching their cities. They would bring in fiery preachers and people would come from miles around. This was the way that the church made its impact.

There is nothing wrong with doing it that way- but it is not always the season for that method. One method however that churches have used to reach their cities since the very beginning is reaching out to the children. In this they use the example of Jesus who sat with the children.

This is one of the stories that is repeated several times in the Gospels and it goes like this-

**People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Luke 18:15-17**

So we are intentional about reaching children and the ministry that Colin has undertaken is focused directly on that mandate.

But today I want to speak about another aspect of ministry- an aspect that is critically important but can be easily overlooked in the desire to get the job done.

It is the aspect of **building the team to do the job at hand-** whatever the job is.

While Jesus was on earth, at one level, His followers had an easy time. Jesus assembled a team and He told everyone what to do- and they simply watched in amazement as things happened.

When Jesus left, He commissioned His followers and now they had to sort out some basic team assembly questions.

Jesus had prepared them for this, of course- but it was still a very interesting challenge. So they tried a couple of different things.

**First**, in Acts 1 the disciples decided that Jesus had picked 12 disciples and so they had to replace Judas. That time they drew straws and added Matthias to the team. We never hear from him again.

**Second**, they decided that they needed to add some people to look after feeding

people so that the 11 disciples can spend time praying and preaching. This time they don't draw straws and appoint 7 deacons. I find it very interesting that 2 of the 7 immediately become preachers.

I am reading between the lines, but it seems to me that this is a comment on an unbiblical separation between "tasks" and "ministry."

But what the followers of Jesus were trying to do was an essential part of doing ministry- they were trying to build their teams.

Team building is one of the challenges at the very heart of our Kingdom assignment.

So how do we do this? This is the million dollar question.

I believe that one of the best team building patterns for Kingdom people is set out in Acts 13 and we will look at this briefly today.

It begins-

**In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:1-3**

### **#1. God Picks The Team**

Now this sounds so easy, doesn't it? "Just let go and let God . . ." I have come to not like this common saying. It just isn't that easy. It is very easy to criticize things when things don't go smoothly. It is very easy to say, "Well, I knew all along that this was a bad plan! Obviously someone didn't let God control the situation!"

"I told you so- people" are worse than useless- they are counter productive. Anyone can criticize things that everyone sees have gone wrong. That kind of criticism also misses the fact that even when, in hindsight we are very sure that God directed a particular way, often there are really big challenges along the way. I wonder if there are any Kingdom projects that have been undertaken that didn't have moments of wondering if the whole idea was just a disaster.

Those who get to the other side will often look back in amazement at how what looked like disaster found a way to victory.

Just because God picks a team doesn't mean that everything will work out smoothly or easily.

Just because there are big challenges does not mean we have missed God's direction.

But the principle that, God picks the team is at the very core of being Kingdom people

What this story does illustrate, however are a couple of "to dos" that we need to take note of.

It begins with God's people, the existing "team" worshipping, praying and fasting together. It doesn't even begin with a vision for a specific task. We are people whose mission is built into our existence. But begins with the team being together and while together having the ears to hear what the Spirit is saying.

And this leads to the 2nd point that this passage makes clear. Not only does God pick the team-

## **#2. God Defines The Mission And Sets The Tasks**

The church meets because that is what a church does- just as a family meets together just because it is a family. The family gathers first and foremost because it is a family.

But as I mentioned already- this is a family with a mission and as the family meets that mission also quickly emerges.

In this gathering a word emerges. It is- **"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."**

The word that came had 2 parts to it, first as we noted it means that God has chosen the members of the team but it also directly states something else. Something that follows directly from this principle. It is highlighted in another passage, in another context, that makes the same point-

**But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 1 Corinthians 12:18**

This passage tells us that not only are we all members of a body- but that we are different parts of that body- each with unique and special assignments.

Not everything in life has nice clear roles- just look at your family. Once people have an attitude that they will do no more than exactly their assignment you know you have a team problem.

In the church we have a big assignment- to spread the news of the KoG. That is an assignment for the whole church and it is not always easy to know where one person's job begins and ends but that should not make us miss the point that each of us as a specific task that God has called us to carry out.

We have been given specific assignments and roles to play- roles that have been laid out by God just as specifically as He has place us in the team

And what do we do with that principle?

First, we take very seriously what God is asking of us. Are we fulfilling our tasks well and quickly?

A part of human nature that I believe we do well to keep in mind is the inclination to look at those around us and wonder, sometimes aloud, if they are actually doing their jobs.

One of the most poignant and frankly embarrassing stories to this effect came at the very end of Jesus' time with the disciples. He had talked to Peter about a couple of concerns about Peter's assignment. Peter obviously didn't like the Boss challenging him.

The story goes like this-

**Then he said to him, "Follow me!"**

**Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them . . .**

**When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" John 21:19-21**

We've all done that and that is why we are embarrassed for Peter but it is not the last story for nothing. We all need reminding that we are responsible for the assignment God has given us.

Second, are we supporting the rest of the team? In a team it is rarely just one person with the task- it is almost always several people working together to get the job

done. The task of supporting the other members of the team is not of secondary importance- that is often the whole assignment that God has given us. Not only are we not to spend our time judging how well others are carrying out their tasks- a huge part of our assignment is playing support roles for the rest of the members of the team.

Our job is to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Our job is to introduce people to Jesus.

But we don't always know what the next step is supposed to be or what the task at hand is.

However when God's people meet together to pray and worship God- He has a way of giving us the next step.

And He also has a way of raising up the leaders and workers who are supposed to taking those next steps and there is no single pattern in fact God has even worked through the lottery system that the disciples tried first.

And Collin and Sarah, it is important for you to know that we as a church have committed ourselves to having God raise up His worker for this assignment. There is an existing team in place here. Some of us have been here a long time, some are newer. There are many different gifts and abilities. There are many different background. We are all ages.

But what we have in common is the knowledge that God has called Neighbourhood Church to be God's family and to reach out to our city with the Good News.

Your assignment is to lead the Youth ministry as a member of this team. In this we are your team members.

In the mission to proclaim the KoG in our city you are members of our team.

This is the team that has identified you as the man chosen by God for this assignment and this is the team that has listened to you, asking the question, "Is this the man God has called up for us?"

The answer is "Yes!"

And so there is a 3rd step-

### **#3. There Is A Commissioning**

When you get a new job- you get an assignment and a starting point. There is a pattern that is very consistent in the NT. When people are called to a position and when that is formally recognized, the church gathers and lays hands on them by way of commissioning.

This is what we have done today. You have just arrived in town. You have just moved into your new home. You are here in church with us for the first time as residents of Nanaimo.

On Tuesday you will officially begin working but before anything further happens we have placed our hands on you as the marker that we are formally recognizing God's call on your life, of the identification of your assignment as Youth Minister, and very importantly that you are a member of this team.

The laying on of hands, in the Biblical context, is a very deep identification. In fact it is such a deep identification that Paul warns us about it with these words- **Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others.**

## **Keep yourself pure. 1 Timothy 5:22**

There is a side of this laying on of the people's hand that extends even to the sins and weaknesses that we carry with us. Without understanding the full package, this could make us quite nervous about such a ceremony. All of us carry weakness and sins with us. Those too are part of the package of the laying on of hands.

But this is not meant to make us fearful- it is meant to remind us of several things-  
1. That we have an obligation to each other to live by a standard that would make others proud.

At a trivial [I hope] level, I will be honest that I have a weakness that I live with. I tend to have a messy work place. Now that I am downstairs in the church, in a room full of junk, that messy comfort level can rise to astonishing heights. Now I have an excuse.

But I also work in a public space and people will walk into my office and I am aware, and am reminded of the fact, that my mess reflects on those I represent. Even if a messy desk doesn't bother me I need to be more aware of the fact that it also represents those I serve. It needs to be neater.

2. That we are to serve each other, bearing our weaknesses in mind. We commit ourselves to work together as real, not idealized people. We commit ourselves to be patient with each other, supporting each other when things are not going well.

Another saying that is often misused is- **"speaking the truth in love"** [Ephesians 4:15]. All too often it is an excuse for being hurtful. This is most decidedly not what this is about. Speaking the truth in love is love sacrificially, seeking the best for someone else.

As members of the same team we really do commit ourselves to support each other in both our strengths and weaknesses.

3. Far from making us anxious or fearful when we join as part of a team with each other- having a realistic, heads up view of what working together is- should give us confidence that we are not going into an assignment with rose coloured glasses on. It is wonderful to be around optimistic people just as it is depressing to be around pessimistic people.

The one group steals the joy of new beginnings and can immobilize new ideas. Those who are pessimistic would do nothing if their pessimism wins every argument.

The other group goes blindly ahead never planning for rainy days. Rainy days will come and for those who are prepared they are not even an inconvenience but for those who are- even a rainy day can derail things.

The Bible challenges us to be people of both hope and realism and to tackle the unforeseen challenges with the reserves that had been laid aside for them and to celebrate the unexpected victories with thanksgiving.

Far from being discouraging a balanced view of the future is actually a source of deep confidence.

The commissioning is a reflection of that confidence.

And then . . .

**The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. Acts 13:4-5**

#### **#4. There Is A Launch**

It is good to be able to sit back and truly enjoy a commissioning. That doesn't always happen but we are happy that we can do this.

But after that the ship sails. Parties are wonderful and celebrations are just that but in this case they anticipate something. They anticipate the launch of a mission- they are about expectation and hope. They are about clear declarations of the team.

But they anticipate a launch. Tuesday you launch and I hope that as you do you will feel the winds of the Spirit filling you with energy and joy as the boat leaves the dock.

But there is one more piece of team building that Acts 13 mentions-

**They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus . . . From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch . . . Acts 13:6-14**

#### **#5. And Then There Are The Adventures!**

The book of Acts is the story of one adventure after another.

The years ahead will be full of those as well. Ministry is about taking a real journey with real adventures.

And yes, there will by times when you will feel like you are way over your head. Don't let that unnerve you.

In fact it is fitting that you have also begun the journey of parenting at the same time. Both parenting and beginning as new assignment have this in common- you have not idea of the challenges you will face BUT it has been done before and you will do it well.

This is a calling from God.

This is an assignment from God.

And there is a team that has invited you in and will support you in your assignment.