



# Learning from the early church

## Study 4 (w/c 23 June) When God Chooses

*"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'" (Martin Luther King Jr)*

### Read Acts 13:1-3

As we encounter episodes such as these, it's important to remember that these passages are simply the record of how a few particular individuals were called to do something on particular occasions. They do not set precedents for how God will or might work on any other occasion. After all, we need to remember that all of us who follow Jesus are called by him and that every calling (because it's God's calling) is of equal intrinsic worth.

Paul and Barnabas had been working in Antioch for some time; see Acts 11:26. How much, do you think, they would have been expecting a particular message from the Holy Spirit or was this a thunder-clap interruption to one of the regular 'services'?

It is interesting that Luke singles out this episode – after all, a little earlier, he simply notes that the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch as the believers there had already started preaching outside the Jewish community (Acts 11:20). Why do think he chose this approach?

Paul and Barnabas were not better Christians because God called them to leave Antioch (nor did he call them because they were better Christians) – he just wanted them somewhere else and the others to be still active in the city. They all had their own calling. How much do you think the others felt they were called to stay in Antioch and continue their mission there? What should we do if we don't particularly feel called to anything?

Assuming that it won't be quite such an obvious and straightforward verbal message, how do we know when God might be calling us and what he would be calling us to?

How much do think God's choice of Paul for this mission depended on his availability and how much on his ability – Paul does lay out his suitability – see, for example, Acts 22:3 or Philippians 3:4-6. How do we contrast the outcome here with Acts 21:4&11 where Paul appears to act in direct contradiction to similar prophetic messages?

How do we balance the need for giving space to listen for God's calling and our working out the response to that: our striving for the gospel (Philippians 1:27); our discovering (and then doing) those 'good works' that God has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10)? Equally, how do you draw the line between those things you do because they're just part of normal life and things/situations you would pray about? In other words, have you ever prayed about which socks to put on in the morning; and if not, why not?

Thinking back to the second reading from Sunday's service (John 21: 15-19), how important was it that Peter was 're-called' by Jesus in a way that mirrored his threefold denial recorded in John 18?