**Sunday 17th May 2020**

**Glynde Lutheran Church**

**Sermon on Acts 13:1 – 3**

**Theme: “The call of the young man Paul to ministry”**

**GROWING YOUNG (3): “What is God calling you to do?”**

***Introduction:***

The young are often undervalued, aren’t they!?

Can I tell you a story about my football career in order to amplify this point…. As a young lad, I was quite small in stature with regard to playing in football teams. Sure, I was a reasonable footballer, but I was often not picked in teams because I was challenged vertically…. One memory that I have is being picked in the forward pocket of our under 13’s team, and kicking quite a lot of goals in the season because I took some surprising marks there, and got quite a few charity frees because of my size….

Well, that was the story of my football career: only just making teams because of my lack of height *and probably lack of ability too*, and yet still being an able contributor to the various teams that I played in.

Another team that I was just part of was the Heathfield-Aldgate “B” grade football team. I played on a wing, and we had some success, although our “A” grade team had more success: they won an Australia wide record *which apparently still stands today,* as to the number of matches won in a row….

I don’t tell you these stories to big-note my football ability…. Anything but…. In the final analysis, I was just an average sort of footballer, but I tell these stories to help us start reflecting on how God wants to make use of the young among us, *rather than the young among us being undervalued as being immature in their faith, or being of limited abilities….*

God certainly wants to make use of each of us in serving Him, *including the young among us.* Let’s hear how God called a young man named Saul *or Paul as he was later known* into ministry for Him, and how God achieved amazing things through this young man….

As we do this, I want you to be thinking about what God is calling you to do in your life, *you who might be a young person, an emerging adult, a single or married adult, a parent with children, a middle aged person, or an older person like me….*

And I want you to be thinking about how we as a church family might together mentor the faith of the young among us, and encourage them in their walk with Jesus….

***Part 1: Scripture teaching***

Well let’s begin by spending a little bit of time thinking about “a young man named Saul” *(Acts 7:58).* That’s how Luke the Gospel writer in his second book, *The Acts of the Apostles,* introduces us to Paul, one of the greatest of the servants of Jesus in the early Church, *if not the greatest.* Luke writes as he describes the stoning of Stephen, *the first Christian martyr:*

**The witnesses *to the stoning* left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul** *(Acts 7:58).*

Why was Saul, a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, *modern day Turkey,* in Jerusalem? Well, Luke tells us that Saul said about himself when defending himself to the Jewish people later:

**“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up here in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel.**

**I received strict instruction in the law of our ancestors and was just as dedicated to God as are all of you who are here today”** *(Acts 22:3).*

It seems that young Saul, *as he was called then,* was a student of the Law in Jerusalem when Stephen was stoned. It also seems that he attended sessions of the Sanhedrin Jewish Council as a student, and it is probably in this context that he voted against Christians “when they were sentenced to death” *(Acts 26:10; cf. 8:1).*

How old was the “young man”, Saul, at this time? Probably only between 15 and 20 years of age, *being born in Tarsus sometime between 15 and 20 A.D. (Wenham, Paul and Jesus, p. 5).*

However old Saul was then, he was very much “a young man”. His youth didn’t stop him, though, from being violently opposed to the followers of the Jesus, who Saul apparently believed were spreading false doctrine about Jesus, about his death on the cross, and about Jesus being raised from the dead….

Listen to what Luke tells us that Paul later said about his earlier days, *this time as he is brought before Herod Agrippa:*

**“I myself thought that I should do everything that I could do against the cause of Jesus of Nazareth. That is what I did in Jerusalem. I received authority from the chief priests and put many of God’s people in prison; and when they were sentenced to death, I also voted against them.**

**Many times I had them punished in the synagogues and tried to make them deny their faith** *(Lit. “blaspheme”, that is say that “Jesus is accursed****”).***

**I was so furious with them that I even went to foreign cities to persecute them. It was for this purpose that I went to Damascus with authority and orders from the chief priests…** *(Acts 26:9-12; cf. 8:2-3; 9:1-2; 22:4-5).*

And we all know what happened when the young man, Saul, went to Damascus: the risen, exalted Jesus appeared to Saul in a brilliant light, which resulted in Saul being blinded. Luke tells us:

**Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?”**

**“Who are you, Lord?”, he asked.**

**“I am Jesus, whom you persecute”, the voice said. “But get up and go into the city, where you will be told what to do”** *(Acts 9:3-5; cf. 22:6-11; 26; 26:12-18; 1 Cor. 15:8).*

Saul went into the city, where he met a Christian named Ananias, whom the risen Jesus had commissioned to go to Saul to restore his sight and to tell him:

**“I have chosen... *(you)* to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and kings, and to the people of Israel”** *(Acts 9:15; cf. 22:14-15; 26:16-18).*

Saul apparently was immediately baptised by Ananias *after something like scales fell from Paul’s eyes.* Saul realised because of all that had happened to him that Jesus wasn’t dead but alive, *and that the followers of Jesus were telling the truth about Jesus….*

The risen Lord Jesus commissioned the “young man” Paul to be his servant: to take his Good News to people everywhere, *including the Gentiles,* *the non-Jewish people….*

What happened to Saul after this? Well, he had numerous adventures. We tend to think from our cursory reading of Acts that Paul escaped from the clutches of the angry Jews in Damascus and went down to Jerusalem immediately to tell the apostles what had happened…. Well, it actually didn’t happen that quickly. Paul himself in one of his letters tells us:

**I went at once to Arabia, and then I returned to Damascus. It was three years later that I went to Jerusalem to obtain information from Peter, and I stayed with him for two weeks. I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord’s brother** *(Galatians 1:17-19).*

Luke in *Acts* tells us that it is here in Jerusalem that Saul first met Barnabas, the encourager, an older man who took Saul under his wing *(Acts 9:27).* After going to Jerusalem, Saul returned to the region of his home town of Tarsus in Cilicia, *modern day Turkey,* again to escape the murderous anger of the Jews *(Acts 9:30; Gal. 1:21).*

The next thing we are told about Saul is in connection with the church at Antioch in Syria, where, Luke tells us, “the believers were first called Christians” *(Acts 11:26).* Luke tells us that Barnabas went from Jerusalem to Antioch, and from there he went looking for Saul to be a partner in his ministry there for the Lord. Luke tells us:

**Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him, he took him to Antioch, and for a whole year the two met with the people of the church and taught a large group** *(Acts. 11:25-26).*

Listen to what David Wenham has to say about his in his book on *Paul and Jesus, the true story:*

**Exactly what made Barnabas do this is impossible to say. But he had met Paul in Jerusalem not all that long before, and had been convinced of the genuineness of his conversion and call. He introduced Paul to the apostles, and he evidently believed in the young man and his potential.** He may have been impressed with his brief ministry among the Greek-speakers of Jerusalem, and regretted that *Paul* had to be shipped off to Tarsus. It is possible that he knew of the ministry Paul had started in Tarsus.

**Whatever the exact reasons, Barnabas saw Paul as the colleague he needed in Antioch, and brought him there. Paul thus got stuck into the leadership of this important growing Jewish-Gentile church, teaching great numbers of people** *(p. 28-29).*

Barnabas valued the “young man” Saul, *later called by his Roman name “Paul” (Acts 13:9).*

Later on*, we are told by Luke,* Barnabas and Saul take money from the church at Antioch to the church in Jerusalem because of a famine in Jerusalem. Quite a lot of time has passed since Paul’s conversion by then. In fact, Paul says in his letter to the Galatians:

**Fourteen years later *after my conversion* I went back to Jerusalem with Barnabas** *(Gal. 2:1).*

During much of this time, it seems that young Saul has been working with Barnabas for the Lord and probably being mentored by him *(Wenham, p. 29-36).* Luke still lists Barnabas before Saul when his says:

**Barnabas and Saul finished their mission** *taking relief to the famine stricken* ***Jerusalem* and returned from Jerusalem taking John Mark with them** *(Acts 12:25).*

Let’s finish our look at the ministry of the “young man” Saul, by reading how the church at Antioch commissioned Barnabas and Saul to go out on missionary journeys through Asia Minor for the Lord:

**In the church at Antioch, there were some prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon** (called the Black), **Lucius** (from Cyrene), **Manaen** (who had been brought up with Herod the governor), **and Saul. While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, “Set apart Barnabas and Saul to do the work to which I have called them”. They fasted and prayed, set their hands on them, and sent them off”** *(Acts. 13:1-3).*

We leave the “young man” Saul now about 30 years of age, or in his early 30’s, about to begin his first missionary journey in company with his mentor, Barnabas… *(the Jerusalem famine was in about 44-46 A.D., and Paul was born 15-20 A.D.; Wenham, p. 35-36).*

***Part 2: Deeper reflection***

As I said last week, the *Growing Young* authors focus on six core commitments of Churches who want to grow young, *in other words churches who want to foster having young people in their midst, and who want to grow the faith of their young people.* These six core commitment are given on their summary diagram, which you can see on the Powerpoint slide*.*

In our first week of this series on the basis of Luke’s account of Jesus being lost in the Temple in Jerusalem at the age of 12 years old, we focused on two of these six core commitments, *commitments that flowed from our reflection on how Jesus would have been cared for the Jewish community in Jerusalem, namely the commitments:*

* **Empathise with today’s young people**
* **Fuel a warm community**

Last week focused on two more of these core commitments, *again commitments which flowed from our Bible reading for last week about Jesus blessing the little children, namely the commitments:*

* **Take Jesus’ message seriously**
* **Prioritise young people (and families) everywhere**

This week our focus is on the last two core commitments, namely:

* **Unlock keychain leadership**
* **Be the best neighbours**

Unlocking keychain leadership is what we have been describing in the story of the “young man” Paul, and how God called him into leadership in ministry, *and did wonderful things for His Kingdom through this young man….*

Maybe, Paul’s ministry for God wouldn’t have happened to the extent it did, though, if the older man, *and dare I say it,the more respected man in the early church*, Barnabas, hadn’t befriended Paul and seen his potential for ministry for the Lord.

That’s what unlocking keychain ministry is all about: giving to the young the keys of ministry.

It is being “intentional about entrusting and empowering all generations, including teenagers and emerging adults, with their own set of keys” *(Growing Young, p. 53).*

The picture is that of you as a parent giving your teenage son or daughter the keys to the car, and saying, “Now you can drive!” Of course, the picture is better fleshed out, with the parent teaching the child to drive before giving him or her the keys, and the parent sitting in the passenger seat alongside the young person giving that person encouragement and help, *just like Barnabas did with Paul.*

Through the story of the “young man” Paul, I want you to be thinking about what God is calling you to do in your life, regardless of your age: as I said at the start, whether *you are a young person, or an emerging adult, or a single or married adult, a parent with children, a middle aged person, or an older person like me….* Or about who God wants you to mentor in his or her faith and ministry….

The last remaining core commitment is that of being the best neighbour that you can. It is subtitled:

**Instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbour well locally and globally.**

Well, I’ve got to say that this is exactly what Paul did: he didn’t condemn the world around him, but he strived to neighbour well locally and globally. He did it not by helping his local and global neighbours *physically,* but by helping them in the ultimate way: by bringing the good news of God’s grace and His mercy and His forgiveness through Jesus.

So…?? Are you and I unlocking keychain leadership in our church here at Glynde? Are we entrusting and empowering young people for ministry? Are we mentoring young people and emerging adults for ministry?

And are we striving to be the best neighbours that we can to the people around us? Well, yes, our mid-week ministries are all about this, I think. We are aiming to care for the people in our community, *particularly those from other cultures, and those with young children….* And our ultimate aim is to care for them by bringing the Good News of Jesus to them….

Like I have in the last couple of weeks, let me suggest a few things that we could be doing, *and maybe you are doing….* For the most part, these are suggestions which are made by the authors of the book *Growing Young:*

* **“Churches that grow young are brimming with staff, volunteers, and parents who demonstrate keychain leadership.** Whoever holds the keys has the power to let people in or keep people out” *(p. 53).*

In other words, in all ministries **“entrust young people with opportunities to lead and contribute”** *(p. 67).*

* **Celebrate volunteers in different ministries and leaders in these ministries by holding a commissioning service.**

“Every fall, the church celebrates its volunteer small group leaders through a commissioning service. Rather than patronizing or ‘honouring’ them with a certificate or token gift, the pastor shares how they are the ‘real pastors’ of the church. Last year, he went as far as to claim *that* the church would get by just fine without him, but *that* the doors of the church would close if these volunteers ever went away” *(p. 67-68).*

In other words, say “Thank you!” *(p.83).*

* **Conduct a young leader assessment: list teenagers or emerging adults, *or younger adults,* who already hold, or could receive, the keys of leadership in our congregation** *(p. 74).*
* **Train young people and emerging adults, and younger adults for ministry: e.g.**
  + Read a Christian book together and discuss it
  + Have an intensive discipleship retreat each year
  + Create an Intern program in your church with regard to Mid-week and Sunday ministries, Junior Youth, Ministry Team, Exec Team
  + Send a promising leader to ALC, or organise and fund promising leaders doing a subject or two at ALC
* **Rather than telling teenagers and emerging adults “You can be anything you want to be”, journey alongside them and help them discover what God has called them to be and do** *(p. 266).*
* **Teach and instruct people about God’s desire that we live as His people, showing mercy and justice to those around us.**

“Our church has more than a *desire* to do good. We understand that this good, this need for justice, comes from our understanding of the gospel. It’s grounded in who Jesus is, who God is, and what life is all about, not just an add-on” *(p. 240).*

These are just some of the ways in which we can entrust and empower young people for ministry, and promote us as being a church that reaches out into the community to help and care for the people around, *and most especially to be a church that brings the Good News of Jesus to people.*

***Conclusion:***

I love thinking about how God called the “young man” Saul, *or Paul as he later became* into ministry for Him. It is a story that reminds us that God wants to use you and me, *no matter what our age and our talents and our abilities,* in ministry for Him: loving and caring for the people around us, and sharing with others the Good News of Jesus.

And it’s a story that reminds us also to be alert to the young people around us, and how God wants us to open doors for them and their ministry, and to mentor them in their ministry for God.