

Lift up your eyes

Recently I have attended two Baptist based conferences and I want to share some reflection on them,

Because some good things took place, also recently we, as a congregation have quite rightly, with our growing pains been looking at ourselves for the next step but I wanted us to lift our eyes up a bit and remind ourselves of our wider connections. When I was inducted as a chaplain, I was asked to promise to keep connected with my Baptist roots – yes by being in membership here, association conferences. But I wanted also to take an opportunity this year of attending both these conferences.

Our readings:- *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."* – Psalms 133:1-3

We are reminded that as we share a common heritage, we belong to a structure for many good reasons – the twelve tribes. Lots of psalms hint and speak that one stick is easy to break but a bundle is so much harder. We can track the growing pains of the people of Israel from the twelve tribes into a monarchy, the division of the people, exile, re-building, etc., We learn from that pilgrimage with God, the need to keep God central, the word (the law read out loud), unity not uniformity. Our reading said brothers – reflecting the era it was revealed in, but we can without changing the essence realise it means all people; well, the ones gathered.

The illustration of the oil on the head of Aaron, that spoke of priesthood and the presence of the Holy Spirit, remind us again that our unity is based on the commonality of faith in the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. The structures are there to enable that, at local congregation level, association, national and international. I recognise how the B.U. assembly has changed over the decades to try and keep that central – it is perhaps most difficult at congregational level, the language we use about our church meetings etc., comes from formal secular type than faith based – but I don't know the answer.

Acts 11:25-30 ²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. ²⁷ During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.'

Our N.T. reading is a classic text used to encourage congregations in giving to Home Mission, B.M.S. and other such organisations. Again, not the part played by the Spirit – Agabus prophesied through the Spirit. It is also perhaps, a moving away from tithing to giving what you can, giving is led not by rules but by the Spirit. We should rejoice at the giving we do here for outside the local situation, but ask is it enough? Budgets verses responding to needs, often asking the same people.

There is also something here about leadership training and mentoring. Note how Barnabus and Saul were both trusted with delivery of the aid; this is part of Sauls coming into his calling. We seek to use trusted individuals and organisations as we give to need.

The conferences:-

Friday evening at Telford at the B.U assembly was the occasion of remembering those ministers/pastors/ BMS workers who had died since the last assembly. I always find this moving and that hymn comes to mind 'we are treading where the saints have trod before', Quietly giving thanks for the service and the grace of God.

Got time to connect with Association, there are concerns that Home Mission is not reaching its targets.

<https://www.baptist.org.uk/Group/Group.aspx?ID=247895>

Above many of talks, the new leaders coming onto the accredited list. Mike Royal was very good on the Sunday, reminding us of our history and how to look forward.

I was there to re-connect with the wider Baptist people I know, as well as few extras. It gave me hope for the future of the Union.

Sent 2003: This was the delayed missional conference of the European Baptist Federation. Took place in Stranger, Norway, a few days before it the Baptist World Alliance had had their conference. Again, I connected with people from the u.k. regional minister, Cemetery Road

<https://www.ebf.org/>

<https://www.ebf.org/sent2023>

I normally run a mile from missional things, but felt constrained to go. There was a stream of young leaders – U.K. about 30 there, but still too much white and grey. It that constraint to recognise and grow leaders – hence the reference to Barnabas and Saul and the church at Antioch. It was so encouraging to be with other Baptists from such a wide geographical area. How good and pleasant it was to be together. The worship was led by a Lithuanian group of 8/9, youngish and very up-beat – I felt spoilt as everything was in English.

Some of the threads; church/congregational planting, varied ways of starting up and maybe some are for a limited time.

Integrated mission – the social action and gospel forth-telling; - reminded me of the book by Ian Randell – Spirituality and Social Change and the ministry of F.B.Meyer. getting that balance of yes part of our mission is to change the world to be better (temperance rescuing prostitutes), but above that is the saving of souls for eternity.

I surrender all sermon/message.

So, this past month I have travelled and had a good time – there are things that have challenged my personal life and ministerial calling. It has been a privilege to lift my eyes from the local to the national and to the international.

Therefore. I want to remind us all that we have been drawn, sent to this congregation for a purpose and need to work that out. Also, that through this congregation we are sent to the national and international Christian life/mission. We may play a part here or be sent further. We are Christians called into this Baptist church to fulfil the 'mission of God' – what is your part?