

Ephesians and Artemis lovers around us? We can only do it the way it was done in Ephesus:

Be a people willing to engage in regular discussion to discover the living word of God, for growth in the word of the Lord is the Spirit's therapy against the deadly cancers of the enemy.

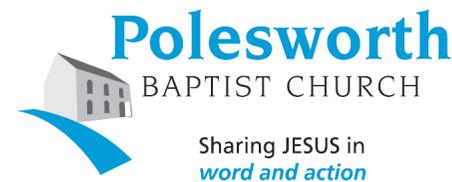
Be a people who trust God for miracles, bless the handkerchiefs and aprons that are today's means for reaching the sick and the suffering around us. Such actions of love are battering-rams against the gates of hell,

Be God's royal priesthood, His holy nation, voluntarily ridding ourselves of all things, things of the heart and things of life which are inconsistent with Christian living. Search out and junk our idols.

And, as I'm sure Paul did in those discussion sessions,
Be a people who express our love for God in worship and prayer for these are God's spiritual anti-darkness missiles against the power of the devil's domain

And being a people of love, live in the love of rescuers who are determined to walk and work with God to bring those trapped in darkness into the light.

May the Lord bless our Christian community as He blessed that early Ephesian Church in bringing many people to turn to Christ and be gathered into the Pentecostal presence of the Holy Spirit to the eternal glory of God our Father.
Amen.



Reflection Two for 16th August 2020
Acts Chapter 19
What's happening in Ephesus?

Acts 19 may seem like a passage of puzzling events. How do they relate together, except that they all happen in Ephesus? That is the clue. The significance of these events is that they did happen in Ephesus.

Ephesus was the 3rd or 4th largest city in the Roman Empire [vying for 3rd place with Syrian Antioch] with some 250,000 people. And it was the home base centre for the worship of Artemis, celebrated there as a fertility goddess, whose temple was counted as one of the '7 Wonders of the World'. She was worshipped as the holiest, the most manifest, Saviour, Queen of the Cosmos. A worship that generated both local and tourist trade, providing employment and enriching the city. Her images were everywhere in the city. And a worship that was expressed spiritually in magic, scrolls of sorcery were known across the empire as 'Ephesian writings'. Ephesus was a megacity of idolatry, a human and demonic centre of the dominion of darkness.

Luke tells us that Paul returned to Ephesus from a visit to Antioch by an interior road, by which he came across some 12 disciples, who must have presented as rather inadequate disciples for he questions them about their faith. He discovers that they haven't received the Holy Spirit because they don't really belong to Jesus. They were disciples of John the Baptist, still stuck in the OT, not living in the Gospel grace of Christ and the Pentecostal presence of the Holy Spirit. But through Paul they turn to Jesus. They are baptised and gathered by the Spirit into the church. Through this event the Spirit beings to move powerfully in Ephesus. The time is right for Christ Jesus through Paul to overthrow Artemis.

Sadly this wider movement flows through yet another refusal of the local synagogue Jews to believe, who publicly malign the way – Luke's term for Christians. So Paul leaves them. He takes the Christians with him and for two years he held daily discussions with them in a local lecture hall. Luke doesn't tell us what Paul discussed but we can assume he shared what he would write about in his letters: that is what the faith is about and what it means to live in the faith. They would have been comforting discussions and also challenging, not just for their content but also in their timing. Ephesus was a very hot place to live. Its public life ran from the early morning to about 11:00 am, shutting down until a late afternoon resumption, about 4:00 pm. Tyrannus probably rented Paul his lecture hall for use in the hot middle part of the day. Paul's discussions ran in lunch time and siesta time. Yet the disciples came. The Word enlivened them. And

the moving of the Spirit that began with the baptised 12 started to shake the city. A movement expressed in the extraordinary miracles that God worked through Paul. [their description as ‘extraordinary’ implies that there are other ordinary miracles.] What was ‘extraordinary’ was the means by which the miracles were effected. Not by personal contact – how could that have happened in a city so controlled by idolatry? Rather God worked through the impersonal means of handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul, which, taken to the sick cured them of illnesses and evil spirits.

Peter Wagner, writing in 1995 tells of his friend William Kumuyi, pastor of the Deep Life Bible Church in Lagos, Nigeria. It was then a church of some 75,000 adults and 40,000 children. He had also planted 4,500 churches throughout Nigeria. Part of their weekly programme is a Thursday night miracle meeting. On one of those nights a pastor of an outlying church felt led to invite all those who had sick people at home to hold up their handkerchiefs, and he prayed a prayer of blessing of God’s healing power upon them. They were to return home, place the handkerchief on the sick person and pray for healing in Jesus’ name. He was unaware that the chief of a nearby Muslim village was visiting his church that night – the first time he had ever attended a Christian service. He did not have sick people in his home, but he held up his handkerchief and received the blessing.

Soon after the chief returned home a 9 year old girl died and he went to her home to attend the wake before her burial. While there, he suddenly remembered the handkerchief, retrieved it, placed it on the corpse and prayed that she would be healed in ‘Jesus name’. Then God did an extraordinary miracle and raised the girl from the dead! The chief called an ad hoc meeting with the village elders who had witnessed the event, and declared to his people, “for many years we have been serving Mohammed; but from this moment on our village will be a village for Jesus!” Needless to say, a Deeper Life Church is now thriving in that village.

In Ephesus the power of Artemis was being broken, the sovereignty of Christ was being brought to the city. Of course the handkerchiefs and aprons were simply symbols. They had no power in themselves. Just as our Zoom Meetings, and What’sApp services and Online Website services are simply means through which the Holy Spirit works to unite us in fellowship as we in our separate homes praise the Lord and call upon Him in prayer. The technology of the means, ancient aprons or modern Wi-Fi, is irrelevant, we are using them to express and share the sovereignty of the Lord, being healed in different ways, living in the sovereignty of Christ over our lives.

One consequence of all this was to encourage the 7 sons of Sceva, in what must have seemed to them a good move for their business, to attempt an exorcism in

the name of Jesus. But the name of Jesus is not a magic formula. It is only effectual when He is called on by faithful Christians, acting in the authority of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. It was not the Moslem chief’s use of the name of Jesus that raised the dead girl but the Christian blessing that was given. In speaking in the name of Jesus The Spirit was rescuing him from his false faith and turning him and then his whole village to the Lord.

All this is a deep challenge to our sophisticated, western faith. Have you heard of the idea of world views? A world view is like thought spectacles. We see the world through the ideas we have taken into our thinking. Since the Enlightenment the west has adopted a more and more materialistic world view. Our culture has become dominated by thinking that denies miracles, demons, hell and all things supernatural. This world view stands in deep contrast with the Scripture, which from creation onwards expresses the real-ness of miracles and the existence of a supernatural realm, which includes malevolent personalised forces whose aim is to undo God’s purposes for His creation.

Both these cannot be true. The first view ultimately assesses everything by our senses, essentially can be seen and measured. The second calls us not to live by sight but by faith. [2 Corinthians 5:7] By faith we know there is a God, by faith we worship Him, by faith we trust Him, by faith we pray to Him, by faith we seek His acting in the world, by faith we take action in the world for Him. And all that comes to us and is exercised by us in the living presence of the Holy Spirit – the Third Person of God reaching out to us, to connect us to the Lord Jesus Christ – the Second Person of God who undoes the devil’s work and brings us home to God the Father – the First Person of God, who lavishes His love upon us. The Three together being the One and Only God. A faith that cannot be found by evidence but only by experience. Yet as the Ephesians and the chief found when you trust yourself to the Lord your experience becomes your evidence.

And it was in their experience of God that the new Ephesian believers sacrificed their old lives, and the idolatrous treasures of that old life in the voluntary burning their sorcery scrolls. And in all this activity Paul is essentially hidden from view. The next thing we hear of him is his decision to go to Jerusalem. What’s happening in Ephesus is the power of God, not of Paul. And all the beneficiaries of the idolatry of Artemis – though they cause a disturbance about the Way - cannot stop it happening. Their 2 hour chant is funeral dirge for Artemis, and unknown to them, a sign of the victory of Christ.

The Ephesus of the early Church no longer exists but Ephesus still lives in the hearts of many around us. Artemis is a toppled goddess but the hopes of Artemis are still alive in the souls of many around us. So let us ask ourselves, how can we take up the work God has given us to do, to be His agents in the rescue of the