

Acts 20-21a

Luke in his account in Acts is now steering a clear path towards the arrest of Paul that will eventually lead to him going to Rome to face Caesar. From now on, Luke concentrates on this almost to the exclusion of all else. There is so much else that is going on with different people spreading the gospel in different cities but Luke is intent on showing exactly how it was that Paul was unfairly arrested, held in prison and unjustly treated, so that his innocence could be established in his defence.

As part of this long story, we see Paul leaving behind the churches that he had founded - final teaching that he could give, and saying goodbye to as many as possible as he heads to Jerusalem to face an unknown future, but one that will certainly include suffering and persecution. With the Spirit speaking through so many people to Paul, warning him of what lies ahead, it is interesting to see that such warning is not given to deter him but to prepare him for what lies ahead. He sees these prophecies as preparation for him and confirming God's will - not telling him to go somewhere else. It is important to be able to see the difference in God's guidance.

Read Acts 20.1-6

The disciples had wisely kept Paul out of this trouble in Ephesus. When is it best to keep a low profile and when to be bold and how might we (and Paul) know the difference?
What is Paul's purpose in this travelling?
Why so many companions on this occasion?

Read Acts 20.7-12

What is driving Paul here?
Can you think of an Old Testament parallel to this remarkable healing?
What does it tell us about Paul?

Read Acts 20.13-24

What is Paul's route and what motivates him?
What does Paul tell us about what drives him and what characterises him?
Knowing what lies ahead, how does he view his own life - and why?

Read Acts 20.25-38

How does Paul sum up his work?
Looking to the future, what does he warn them about and why?
How does he finish this time with them?

Read Acts 21.1-9

Plot the route that Paul and his companions took.
Increasingly Paul is warned about what lies ahead. How does he behave because of this?

Read Acts 21.10-16

Again, Paul is severely warned but he goes onwards. Why?
At what point is warning from the Spirit something to heed and at what point simply forewarning to help face what lies ahead? How do you think you can tell the difference?
How do you think Paul felt as he got nearer and nearer to Jerusalem, knowing what he did?

Reflect on how the Spirit leads us, especially through really hard times.