

ACTS 14:24 – 15:5

‘YOU CAN’T BE A CHRISTIAN AND THINK THAT’ ..... Some years ago those words were directed at me. At the time they seared through me. They were some of the most painful words ever spoken to me and reduced me to tears which is something that very rarely happens. They hurt so much not because they were true, which I don’t believe they were, but because it made me realise how much it meant to me to be to Christian. Fortunately for me rather than having a negative effect those words caused me to embark on a deeper walk with God.

To some extent my experience helps me to empathise with those early (Gentile) Christians because the (Jewish) Christians were effectively saying, ‘You are not a proper Christian unless...’. The unless in their case being the need to agree to, and to conform to, Jewish Law and rituals. The assumption was that the only route to Christianity was via the Jewish tradition.

It is fair to say both groups were rattled, upset and disturbed by what was happening. No-one likes the foundation of their faith and life to be shaken. It can’t have been easy for the Jewish converts to come to terms with a much more personal God. A God who walked alongside each person. In some senses the Jewish faith had been an objective faith, a faith in which what was expected of them was very clear. It could be defined and confined and there is a certain security in that.

It is a very human need to feel secure in our faith but in order to maintain that security we sometimes build a wall around our self and around our faith. On the surface that might sound reasonable but it becomes less reasonable if in so doing we limit our own growth or put a stumbling block in the way of others.

There is perhaps wisdom in the idea that when we find ourselves kicking against something we press the pause button and reflect on why we are reacting in that way. We too can fall into the same trap as the Pharisees.

The Spirit can be described by many words but one that certainly did not and does not apply is ‘Predictable’. The action of the Spirit is as unpredictable today as for those early Christians.

What the prophets in our midst have to say can be very uncomfortable both for them to articulate and for us to hear. The Spirit is, quite rightly, often

described as a most 'Uncomfortable Comforter' effectively upsetting the applecart just when we think we have got a grip of things. With that in mind let us take some time to prayerfully ponder on the following question:

How prepared are we to feel uncomfortable for the sake of The Kingdom? Do we have the Faith, Hope, Trust and Courage to allow God to turn us upside down to point us in new directions?

Pam Butler