

Setting up shop
Bible reading: Acts 18.1-11



Do you not know that you are God's Temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you? For God's Temple is holy, and that Temple is you. 1 Corinthians 3.16-17

Paul wrote that to the church in Corinth about ten years after this first visit. Corinth, like every other Greek city, was full of temples — like the ancient temple of Apollo, god of the prophetic spirit, dominating the city centre. Or the temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, sitting high above the city on the citadel of the Acrocorinth. Or of course the temple of Caesar and the imperial family, keeping a watchful eye on the Forum. But Paul, after his high-profile dialogue with the philosophers in Athens, drops below the radar in Corinth.

If Athens was the cultural heart of the Greek world, Corinth was its commercial hub. Straddling the Isthmus, its two harbours at Cenchreae and Lechaem looked both East and West, controlling the East-West trade routes between Rome and the lucrative markets of Asia. Like all the great cities of the Mediterranean, it had its thriving commercial quarter, populated by a cosmopolitan mix of migrant artisans and traders. Migrants had a recognised place in the life of the city, not quite integrated, but tolerated and allowed to practise their own religions (as long as they kept quiet and paid their taxes).

Maybe Paul was getting tired of travelling, after months of being constantly on the move (his 18 months in Corinth (v.11) is the longest he's stayed anywhere for quite some time). Or maybe it was his new friends Aquila and Priscilla (vv.2-3) who suggested a better way to connect with the life of the city: setting up shop. "Tentmakers" worked in leather, making anything from ships' sails to shop awnings or booths for the Isthmian Games. Aquila and Priscilla's workshop (with sleeping quarters in the back room) gave Paul a perfect base for engaging in conversation

with passers-by. It also gave him financial independence — something he was fiercely proud of in his later dealings with the Christians in Corinth (I Corinthians ch.9). Paul's "Tentmaking" has become an inspiration to many of us in self-supporting ministry today!

Migrant traders had their own social networks. Going along to the synagogue on the Sabbath was the obvious place to make new contacts, as it would be for any Jewish traveller arriving in a strange city (vv.4-5). Paul never gave up taking the message of Jesus "to the Jew first" (Romans 1.16). It is only after being turfed out of the synagogue that he feels free to turn to the Gentiles (v.6) — never a decision Paul took lightly (cf. 1 Corinthians 9.19-23). The synagogue was probably in a house in one of Corinth's narrow back streets, so having Paul move next door (v.7) must have been a constant irritation — especially when his message began to attract some high-profile supporters (v.8). Paul baptized Crispus himself — cf. 1 Corinthians 1.14.

So a new church begins to grow in the shops and houses of those back streets — nothing grand or showy, not much money or social standing, not much in the way of education (1 Corinthians 1.26-31). But it's built on foundations of solid rock: the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1.30, 2.6-7); the love of Jesus (1 Corinthians 13); the prophetic life of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12). And "the best of all is" (as John Wesley used to say), "God is with us!" *One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no-one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people."* Acts 18.9-10

God bless, Loveday.

*Jesus, where'er thy people meet
There they behold thy mercy-seat:
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found
And every place is hallowed ground.*