

Stop it! Acts 25.1-12

Still stuck in Caesarea! The picture shows the sea front, looking from the imperial palace across the hippodrome (sandy area middle right) to the harbour. Today's TFTD is from Pam Butler.



'I really don't like receiving those Round Robin Letters at Christmas'. So said a friend of mine who is also a minister. I wonder if you have ever felt like that? He did have, and does have, a point in expressing his feelings in that way. Lovely as it is to hear news from our friends and loved ones at Christmas, some of those letters do read like an entry in 'Who's Who'. I plead guilty to having written letters like that when I was proud of the achievements of my children and when things were generally going well. What is wrong with that you might ask? Well on the surface nothing is wrong with it but if we dig a bit deeper we might begin to understand how those letters are received by those whose self-esteem is at rock bottom. This is made all the worse when the good fortune of our friends is attributed to God. Then folk can begin to feel that they are of little worth not only in their own eyes but also in the eyes of God. Just something for us all to ponder next time we are writing our Christmas letters. Trust me this really does have something to do with the life and works of Paul.

I find Paul a formidable character. A man who is zealous and uncompromising both before and after his conversion. A giant of a Christian but someone I find it hard to identify with. Someone whose CV reads like one of those Christmas letters that can get so under our skin that we want to say STOP IT I CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE OF THAT and to cause us to ponder what on earth has our life got to show for itself in comparison to the life of Paul?

I read something recently that made me think. I don't know about you, but I have never really thought of Paul, prior to his conversion, as being someone who God would smile upon. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe God saw this man as passionate in his pursuit of what he believed to be God's will. The fact that he was misguided, in the way he went about it, did not stop God valuing his intentions. The point is God recognised the motivation of his heart and harnessed it to the benefit of us all. God's greatest concern is what lies within us, what motivates us.

I find it far easier to identify with some of the group of 12 disciples that worked so closely with Jesus. Why do I find it easier to identify with them? Quite simply because they don't come across as followers who never veer off the path, never have doubts, are never afraid, never lose patience and are never puffed up with pride. In other words much more like the rest of us.

I hope by now you are thinking 'Why on earth does she want to measure her own discipleship against that of anyone else?' The answer is I don't. We do ourselves and God a dis-service if we judge our discipleship against that of any other person. Each one of us is unique. God knows us inside out. He knows our heart and he knows our particular gifts. He hand-picks us to live out our faith in a way only we can do and so play our part in the furtherance of the Kingdom.

God could see how Paul's character and commitment could be best harnessed. He knows how our unique characters and gifts can be best used and where we need extra gifting he supplies that. We are called to follow where God leads. Called to follow the path that only we can tread. Called to hold our heads up high as companions to each other along the way.

We are not called to think our part is any more or any less important than the parts others are called to play.

In God's hands we can all fulfil our calling.