



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Acts of Little-Known Disciples: Mnason

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

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Acts 21:7-16

The book is titled “The Acts of the Apostles” and we know the stories of Peter and Paul and Barnabas, famous disciples of Jesus.

Last week and today are the stories of what I call the acts of some little-known disciples. First, Matthias, the disciple who replaced Judas; and today is the story of Mnason, and that is how you spell his name, an early disciple.

(Read Acts 21:7-16)

The Living Bible calls him “an old disciple.” The New English Bible describes him as one “who has been a believer since the early days of [Christianity].”

The message is clear, Mnason is an old-timer; he’s been around for a long time, but the fact is for us, he’s a little-known disciple.

We do know some things about him: He lives near Jerusalem, but he came from Cyprus. Cyprus was the home of Barnabas, the great encourager of the New Testament missionaries and an early partner with Paul.

Perhaps Barnabas and Mnason were friends; maybe that’s how he had met Paul.

He provides hospitality for Paul and Luke. And you have to understand, Paul was a controversial figure.

The word was that he was going to be arrested when he got to Jerusalem, so it took a special person to have Paul as a houseguest.

But Mnason, an early disciple, one of the early believers, had kept the faith all these years, and I think there are a couple of lessons to be learned from this little-known disciple.

The first is simply this: Faith has to have a beginning. Faith has to have a beginning.

You wonder how he was drawn to Jesus. Did Mnason hear Jesus preach one day, and his words penetrated Mnason's heart?

Perhaps Mnason saw Jesus touch a blind man who then leaped with joy at seeing the trees, the clouds, the people, this man who healed him.

Maybe Mnason had followed at a distance for many days, several weeks, and the weeks grew into months and then one day he realized there was a growing, inner impulse to know Jesus better, to accept all that he offered, and he believed. He became an early disciple.

This brief reference to this little-known disciple reminds us that faith has to start somewhere. A commitment has to be made.

Your family and your upbringing may include religious examples and habits of faith, but one day you have to embrace it yourself.

It comes down to each one of us, at some point in our life, saying, "Yes, I believe!"

And then you enter your journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

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How many times have I heard someone make this excuse: “My parents insisted that I go to church, and now I don’t want any part of it.”

And I want to say, and sometimes have, “When are you going to grow up? The essence of maturity, spiritual or otherwise, is taking responsibility for yourself!”

The step we are all invited to take is the beginning of the journey of faith, by saying, “Lord, I believe!”

The other thing we can learn from Mnason is that faith grows, faith lives on. Yes, faith has a beginning, but faith doesn’t end with us; just as it didn’t end with Mnason.

Life itself is characterized by growth. Let me put it this way: if you’re not growing older, you’re not living!

Faith is ongoing; we never fully or completely arrive. We are always growing into our faith.

Listen again to what Paul wrote to the Philippians about his own faith: “...I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ...”

I wonder if that’s what Paul and Luke and Mnason talked about, prayed about that night in Mnason’s house. The candles flickering as they talked long in the night...did they look back, to when Paul first believed, how Barnabas was there for Paul at the beginning of his faith; and now it’s come to this.

Should Paul press on to Jerusalem or turn around and go back, find other places to preach the gospel, a safe place, avoid arrest?

Decisions between difficult choices are always agonizing. How do you break the stalemate and move forward?

In the midst of difficult decisions, when the way forward is not easy, it's always good to have someone to talk with, to pray with.

Could this be why Luke included this story and mentioned by name this little-known disciple?

In the hospitality of this early disciple, in this act of a little-known disciple, could Mnason have offered Paul an encouraging word that sent him off to Jerusalem with a renewed faith, a strengthened faith, a faith that would carry Paul as he pressed on and lived out his final days?

Like Paul and Mnason, we live and serve in the meantime, between what has been and what will be, decisions to be made between difficult choices, and this life in the meantime calls for discernment, perseverance, and courage.

Meantime also refers to the climate in which we live and breathe: It's a mean time. The tone of public debate and speech is coarse and vulgar, and verbal violence continues to increase.

Complex issues are reduced to Facebook memes or tweet-sized slogans aimed at the single goal of winning an argument or humiliating an opponent.

Living the faith in this environment becomes a dangerous and controversial journey as we ask how we can serve our call to follow Jesus Christ.

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What this story shows is how important it is to discuss hard things and difficult choices in settings that allow people to speak and listen with the simple but crucial goal of mutual understanding and support.

Mnason was finding a way to express his faith as a disciple of Jesus as he encouraged Paul to meet the challenges awaiting him.

I believe Mnason shows us the value of generosity, especially when expressing gratitude and demonstrating support for a troubled friend.

They prayed, trusting that God's Spirit was creatively at work and would bring life out of the chaos of the meantime and mean times.

The question each of us must ask ourselves today is: what kind of conversations are we having that focus on God's desire for you and me to do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God?

What conversations are we having that lead us into the next steps of living our faith, inspiring us as disciples of Jesus Christ to consider our own faith, our relationships with all people of different races, different opinions, different cultures?

Like Mnason we, too, are called to a life of generous hospitality and courageous encouragement as we enter the story of the Acts of the Apostles.

Not the Systematic Theology of the Apostles, not the Book of Order of the Apostles, not the Policy Manual of the Apostles, not the "This is how we've always done it" Apostles.

No, simply “The Acts of the Apostles”; and while so much of the road ahead is uncertain, just as it was for Paul and Luke and Mnason, we know some things that are as solid and sure as the ground beneath our feet, and the sky above our heads.

We know God is love.

We know Christ’s peace embraces us.

We know the Spirit gives us each other and binds us to each other in love and peace.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

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WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630

www.westminster-church.org