

group Bible Study – May 16, 2007

Read Acts chapters 19-21

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The writer and pastor Eugene Peterson is fond of saying that Christian spirituality is simply life, "Life, life, and more life." In other words, our life of faith means little unless it is embodied in the ordinary and mundane of our days, in the very push and pull of life lived. And so it's in the context of this spirituality-as-life-lived that we find Paul on one of his last missionary journeys in Acts 19-21. The three chapters cover Paul's trips from Ephesus to Jerusalem and include some fascinating descriptions of Paul as he lived life with the early church. There was the healing through miracles (19:11-12); speaking in tongues (19:6); and even the death of a man because of Paul's lengthy preaching! (20:7-12)

As I've sat with these chapters, however, something about Paul stands out to me. He was known as a brilliant orator and advisor, to be sure, but he lived life with people on his missionary journeys. He is quoted as saying in 20:18, "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia." Despite all of his preaching and expositing he beckons churches to remember his way of living amongst the people, and amongst the very ordinariness of life.

Acts is a dynamic book which recounts a dynamic time in the life of the church. The vibrancy of the holy spirit is clear with each passing page. As we read this in the 21st century, it's easy to hope for our churches to reclaim something of the same vibrancy we see in these verses. And yet we live in a different time, a different culture, and a different context. The holy spirit's work will be different – and we will need eyes to see and ears to hear the ways in which the spirit works in our midst. And the Spirit *will* work, it will be in the context of life: life, life, and more life.

What will this mean for SPU as we seek to live by a communal ethic? As we seek to live under the auspices of God's grand story? It may mean God shows his face in profound ways during Group, floor bible studies, or urban service projects. But much more likely God will show His face during breakfast in Gwinn; playing Frisbee in the loop; or walking to class with friends. The difference will be whether we have eyes to see and ears to hear the Spirit working, and whether we'll pay attention to God's presence in the way we live life, as Paul says, the *whole time* we're together.