

Acts 15:1-21

"Unlearn"

By a show of hands, how many of y'all have ever heard of Lewis and Clark and the Core of Discovery? **(pause for response)** Do any of y'all remember from your middle school social studies class what they did? **(pause)** In 1803 in order to help fund the Napoleonic Wars, Napoleon Bonaparte sold Louisiana to the United States of America. President Thomas Jefferson asked Congress to pay for an expedition to explore the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson charged Merriweather Lewis to lead the Core of Discovery and to find a water way for trade all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Lewis chose William Clark to help lead the Core of Discovery, and they set out on the Missouri River in May of 1804. The expectation was the Missouri River would connect with other streams and rivers that would lead West to the Pacific. However, by the end of May 1805, Lewis and Clark reached the source of the Missouri River. When Lewis looked over the next hill he saw a plain and mountains. Indians had told Lewis there would be mountains, but Lewis was expecting sloping green mountains like the Appalachians. What they found were the towering bare mountains of the Rockies! Lewis and Clark knew about river boat exploring. To press on meant they would have to unlearn what they had learned. **(pause)** Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever thought you knew exactly what you were supposed to do only to discover God has something else in mind?

God had done this incredible thing. In Acts 10 God sent God's Holy Spirit to the Gentiles and saved them by Grace. Peter saw it, and Peter Baptized everyone in the home of Cornelius, who was a Gentile, and a Roman Centurion. In Acts 13:13-49 **Paul and Barnabus** have been preaching to the Jews of Antioch of Pisidia. There the Jews ran them off. But **Paul and Barnabus** declared they would answer God's call.

"For the Lord commanded us, saying,
'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles.
That you may bring salvation to the uttermost
parts of the earth'" (Acts 18:47 RSV).

Now the chickens have come home to roost. Salvation has always been for the Jews. This is what they believed. The Jews believed they had been scattered because they were not obedient to the law. Circumcision is a BIG deal in the Law of Moses. Paul, Barnabus, and Peter are now testifying that God is reaching out to Gentiles, and the Gentiles are being saved WITHOUT circumcision. **(pause)** Is it any wonder people wanted to fight about it? **(pause)** I imagine it was like their culture and heritage was being threatened. The bare bone truth of what God was asking the Jews to do through Paul, Barnabus and Peter was to unlearn what they had learned.

When I graduated from college, my Dad gave me a copy of William Faulkner's, "The Sound and the Fury." When I opened the book I found a note from Dad which said, "Now that your formal education has ended, it is time for the rest of your education to begin." For all of our graduates this morning let me offer the same advice. Your formal education has ended. It is time for the rest of your education to begin. How will you unlearn what you have learned? How will you apply the information you have worked to master and use skills you have gained to the challenges you face in the "Real World"?

The Jews have struggled with this for a long time. For centuries they have been taught and believed God scattered this people because they did not follow every dotted "i" and every crossed "t" of the Law of Moses. All of the Law is important, but the Law is impossible to follow on our own. We need God's grace. It is God's grace made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ which changes people. The law doesn't change people. Religion doesn't change people. Preachers don't change people. **(pause)** Try as I might I have no power to save a single soul in this place. I have no power to keep this church from choosing a path which leads to closure. All I can do is point. All I can do is try my best to be open to the call of the Holy Spirit in my life, and then invite y'all to come with me. Along the way I am going to be changed. You may be changed to, but that change is God's love at work in our lives. God's love toward us, and in us. God's love moving us together in

Christ. God's love calling us to reach out to the people outside this room for God. (pause) To do that we must unlearn what the scripture says:

Deuteronomy 6:5.

"You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your might."

and Leviticus 19:18;

"You shall not take vengeance or
bear any grudge against the sons
of your own people, but you shall
love your neighbor as yourself."

To unlearn the Law of Moses is to recognize all of the Law is based on love for God and love for one another. That's what the Jews struggled to understand. They had been taught blind obedience to the Law of Moses was the way to salvation. However, love is why we crazy Gentiles are included into God's holy family. It was a hard lesson to unlearn.

Lewis and Clark had to unlearn what it meant to be cross country explorers. The challenges in front of them were not the same as the challenges behind. River explorers cannot canoe the mountains. They were still explorers, but now they had to be a different kind of explorer. The same is true of the church. We are called to go therefore and make disciples. For close to 1700 years churches and pastors would create wonderful programs, build beautiful churches, have awe inspiring choirs, and then shout from the doors, "Y'all come on in! The waters fine" (*Oh Brother Where Art Thou*). (pause) Too few people are willing to hear it today, and too many don't believe it. The days of being the church by canoeing the well-watered rivers of religion are over. It is time to leave the canoes aside. We cannot canoe over the mountains and it is the time to get moving.

On the Day of Pentecost everything changed for the disciples. First of all they were no longer the Duh-ciples. The Holy Spirit had equipped them for ministry, just as the Holy Spirit equips us every day for ministry through God's grace. The Jewish people were to be a holy nation sharing with the world how good it is to be loved by God. Our call is to make disciples. The call has not changed. However, the road before us does not look anything like the road behind us. (pause) There are spiritual and relational mountains to climb. The difficulties of mission and organization are different. This room is filled with people who have either never left Denton, or who moved away and moved back. (pause) I don't want to be unsympathetic to the challenge. But the truth is while our feet never meant to leave Denton's fertile soil, the spiritual landscape has changed under our feet. The road ahead is not like the road behind. The task is ours to go on ahead. The Holy Spirit is calling and equipping us for this task. So what are we gonna do? (pause) Church, what are we gonna do? (pause) The call is the same. Make disciples, lead people to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Then walk with them so that together we become the church God has called us to be; God's hands and feet at work in the world for God's glory. (pause) How do we do that when the old ways no longer work? (pause) I have been giving it a lot of thought. I am still chewing on it. However, I have figured out this much. We are gonna have to unlearn what we have learned.

If we really believe God loves us where we are then we have to get outside our doors to form authentic relationships with people where they are. If God loves people right where they are then so must we. We cannot just talk about it, we have to live it. God is calling us to live God's love out loud. Look around this room. People are not coming to us to hear the good news of God's love for them. If they won't come to us, then we have to be resolved to go to them. I know learning to do a familiar job in a new way is hard. However, just because it is confusing does not mean we cannot do it. After all Lewis and Clark did find the Pacific. The Apostle's followed God's grace to start the Church. God is reaching out in grace to give us the tools. We have to be willing to unlearn what we have learned, and obey.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen