

God's Grace in Mission Work

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[0 : 0 0] Please leave your Bibles open in Acts chapter 14 as we look at this week's section of Paul's first missionary journey. Well, I want to start, I guess, by asking you that question at the top of the sermon outline.

And that is, how do we tell when we're on the right track in life? That is, that God is with us as we do our work. Is it when things are going smoothly? Is that an indication?

What happens when there are challenges and failures? Does that mean God is not with us and we're not doing what God wants? And often I think we feel the latter, don't we? Because when things are hard, then perhaps we think, oh, maybe we're not doing what God wants us to do.

And we take that attitude not just in life, but in ministry and in mission as well. And so we become discouraged if there are setbacks while we do God's work. Well, in the last few weeks, we've seen, of course, that Paul and Barnabas had been sent out by the church, led by the Holy Spirit.

And yet they've been seeing a lot of persecution and countering them. Yet at the same time, even as there is opposition, the word of the Lord has continued to spread.

[1 : 1 1] Many people are coming to faith in Jesus. Well, in today's passage in Acts 14, we're going to see this pattern recurring. So it's really more of the same. Paul and Barnabas are experiencing what they have been experiencing through their missionary journey so far.

But whereas in the last few weeks, we've concentrated on different things. So we've in some weeks looked at God's big picture plan, his strategic plan and mission. Other weeks, we've looked at the content of the gospel.

What is it that Paul himself preached and why? This week, I want to spend some time just reflecting on this aspect of hardship and suffering when it comes to God's mission.

But first, let's look at the text. And as we go through it, again, I'll just bring to mind some of the things we've talked about in recent weeks. And so you'll see, again, this recurring pattern play out in the three cities that Paul and Barnabas are going to visit.

So verse 1, Paul and Barnabas come to Iconium. It reads, At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went, as usual, into the Jewish synagogue. So first, we see again that Paul goes to the Jews, as he said he would.

[2 : 2 3] But then in the synagogue, they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. And so again, we're seeing now that the mission and the gospel is not just going to the Jews, but to the Gentiles as well.

And in this case, the Greeks that are in the synagogue are obviously God-fearing Gentiles. However, as occurred in Pisidian Antioch, there is also opposition.

So we read the next line, But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. Interestingly, it's not just Paul and Barnabas that are being targeted, but the brothers and sisters that are in the synagogue, people that have believed as a result of Paul's preaching, Barnabas' preaching, that are also being attacked.

But Paul and Barnabas, they stayed to defend the faith. So, reading on. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.

And again, as in Acts, we've seen the signs and wonders are confirmation, testifying to the truth of the gospel. But then we see this dividing line of humanity emerge yet again, as I talked about last week.

[3 : 44] Remember how I said that the dividing line is no longer between Jews and Gentiles, as it was the case when they had the law. The Jews had the law and the Gentiles didn't. But rather, the new dividing line now between humanity is between those who reject God's word or those who believe.

And so we read, the people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews, that is, against the gospel. Others with the apostles, that is, with the gospel.

Then we read that there was a plot afoot among both Jews and Gentiles. Again, you see they've grouped together, not Jews against Gentiles, but Jews and Gentiles together with their leaders to mistreat them and stone them.

But they, that is, Paul and Barnabas, found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and onto the surrounding country where they continued to preach the gospel.

Incidentally, if you're interested to see where these places are, here's the map from last week, and you can see them going from Lystra to Derbe as well. Now again, we see here, don't we, that Paul and Barnabas are suffering what they have been suffering throughout this time.

[4 : 59] And even, you recall, when Paul was in Jerusalem, there was also a plot then, wasn't there? But God had revealed that plot to him, like here, and so Paul and Barnabas managed to escape.

They are delivered by God to go on preaching in another city. And so on to Lystra they go, verse 8. In Lystra there said a man who was lame, he has been that way from birth and had never walked.

Here again, we hear echoes, don't we, of what Peter and John did in Jerusalem. Remember, at the very start in chapter 3, they had healed a beggar, a lame beggar, at the temple.

Here's another lame man. Then he listened to Paul as he was speaking. And I presume that he would be speaking in Greek. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed, and called out, Stand up to your feet, or stand up on your feet.

At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. Now, interestingly here, in this city, there's no mention of going to a synagogue first. Perhaps there is not that many Jews there.

[6 : 07] And judging by the crowd's response, speaking in the local language, perhaps many of them were Gentiles anyway. Or it could be that Paul and Barnabas hadn't quite made it into the city yet.

They had met this man at the gate. Anyway, verse 11. And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted out in the Lycanian language, The gods have come down to us in human form.

Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and reefs to the city gates, because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

And so we see here that Paul and Barnabas have had to adapt their approach. If they had gone into the synagogue, they would have preached from the law and the prophets, but here they're going to have to do something different.

And it seems here that their signs and wonders were being misconstrued. Instead of being a means to authenticate the gospel message, these locals mistake Paul and Barnabas as gods.

[7 : 14] Now I'm just wondering, has anyone here done Latin for their high school? Quite a few, very good. Including my daughter, who doesn't want to put up her hand.

That's fine. But apparently, I've read, and I don't know whether you've read that as part of your year 12 text or whatever, but there is a legend in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, right?

Where the story goes that the god Jupiter, or Zeus in the Greek, and his son Mercury, or Amaze in the Greek, visited the Phrygian hill country, which if you look at the map, it's very close to this place.

They came disguised as mortals seeking lodging. And according to the legend, an elderly couple welcomes them, and what the gods do is transform their house into a temple.

This is all legend, by the way. And then made them priests. However, those people who rejected Zeus, or Jupiter, and Mercury, had their houses destroyed.

[8 : 20] All right. Does it ring any bells to you, Latin? No? Didn't study that part of the text? Okay, that's fine. Well, it seems then that the crowd here was aware of this legend.

Remember, Ovid was written a long time ago. At that time, they had Ovid too. So they thought Zeus and Hermes had returned. And so this time, they wanted to honor the gods properly, otherwise their houses would be destroyed.

And so even the priest of Zeus, who's outside, he's in the temple outside, he came all the way to the gates, bringing the bulls and the wreaths, in order to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas.

So that's the context in which we understand how they responded. But again, just like it was on Cyprus, these pagan Gentiles are really under the deception of Satan, aren't they?

There is no mention here of Jews or God-fearing Gentiles. So in response, Paul's sermon now has to be adapted so that he has to preach to them from where they are, to meet them where they are.

[9 : 29] And so he uses a more foundational understanding of creation, something they can see with their own eyes, rather than preaching from the law and the prophets, rather than talking about God's covenant with Israel.

So here we read in verse 14, that when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out in the crowd, shouting, Friends, why are you doing this?

We too are only humans like you. We are bringing you good news, that it's the gospel telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God. We made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.

Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. So what Paul and Barnabas are doing here is appealing to what we call general revelation.

[10 : 29] That is not needing to go into the Bible, but just by what they can see in creation. They can observe that God has been good to them, kind to them by giving them rain, crops and food that brings joy to their hearts.

This is what is known as God's common grace to all humanity, as opposed to the special grace that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul and Barnabas are saying, look, you're receiving all these things, and these are actually from God.

They are not gods in themselves. And we are not gods. We are mere humans, creatures just like you and me and everyone else. And yet, even though they can see all that with their eyes, the message that Paul and Barnabas preach fall on deaf ears, don't they?

At least for most of them. Because they kept wanting to sacrifice. They didn't want to listen. They kept sacrificing, wanting to sacrifice to them. And so, again, we see this point, isn't it?

That it's not how well Paul and Barnabas preach that will make people believe, isn't it? But rather, God's supernatural work is required so that people's eyes can be opened.

[11 : 42] Only those who are appointed to eternal life, as we read last week, will believe, have that gift. Now then, to make matters worse, we find that the Jews soon arrived from Antioch and Iconium.

So, apparently, they're probably just following Paul around, motivated by jealousy. And so, verse 19, some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over.

They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day, he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

So, again, as in Iconium, there is persecution. But this time, they even succeed in stoning Paul. Except they didn't do their job properly. Somehow, God protects them.

They leave him outside the city, thinking he's dead. But after some disciples gather around, they bring him back into the city. Which actually is a real encouragement, isn't it?

[12 : 44] Because what it shows is that despite all the persecution and seeming unbelief, there were actually some disciples that did believe. And these were the ones that came out and brought him back in.

So you see, there is actually fruit in the city, even though we also see opposition. But Paul and Barnabas then decide to move on to Derbe the next day.

Not a lot is recorded in Derbe, but in verse 20, we read that they preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. And then, in verse 21 to 28, what we then see is Paul and Barnabas retracing their steps, going back where they came from.

So, reading, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church, and with prayer and fasting, again, something that was done in Antioch, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust.

[13 : 51] After going through Pisidia, they came into Panthilia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Atalia. And, if you want to see another map, a different map, which is also printed out in the outline, you see the dotted lines, them retracing their steps.

They don't stop in Cyprus, of course, they just go straight back from Atalia. And so we read, from Atalia, they're saved back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles, and they stayed there with the disciples a long time.

So, if you look at my outline, I've just summarized the two aims that Paul and Barnabas had as they were retracing their steps. The first is to strengthen and encourage the disciples in the midst of hardship.

You see, the aim of gospel work is not just to convert people, but rather to see them continue in their faith. That's important. And the early church in these cities faced many challenges.

[15 : 04] There was persecution, but there was also temptation. Both are, in one sense, two sides of the same coin, because the aim of persecution and temptation that the devil uses is really to draw people away from God.

And the evil one uses the fear of hardship to do that, either because they do feel the hardship and persecution or they're tempted away for fear of being persecuted.

Paul and Barnabas therefore reminded them to stay true to the faith. Don't let this persecution turn you away from believing the gospel in the first place.

And then they appointed elders so that the elders then can do that same job of teaching and leading them to keep faithful. And then as they head home, we read that Paul and Barnabas also took the opportunity to stop by at a few more places on the way home, and as they did, they preached the word.

We don't get a lot of detail here, but the sense is really that, you know, it's just as they were heading home, they just took any opportunity that arose to preach the gospel.

[16 : 18] And so again, we see, you know, there is plan and intentional mission. So they said, we're going to Iconium, we're going to Antioch, we're going to Lystra. Plan, they knew what they were going to do when they get there.

But then, there is also preaching that happens that it's just along the way, you know. And that's true for us as well, isn't it? As a church, we have, you know, planned outreach, going to the Blackburn Market by the station once a month.

But then there are also opportunities that arise, don't they, as we are just going about our day. I shared this morning that I used to have the opportunity to share with my barber, because I don't know why barbers need to keep talking to you when they cut your hair.

So anyway, and sitting there, can't go anywhere, he starts talking to me, that's the opportunity to share the gospel, isn't it? And you, I'm pretty sure you have all these sort of opportunities along the way as well, sitting by the bus stop or whatever.

I don't know, maybe you don't talk to people at the bus stop or whatever, but there are such occasions, isn't it? And, you know, Paul and Barnabas probably waiting at the, you know, I don't know, shipping terminal or whatever they had in those days, waiting for the winds to come the right direction, and they probably talked and took the opportunity to preach to whoever was listening.

[17 : 36] So God gives us both those opportunities and also asks us to be strategic in planning how we will go about as a church or as individuals preaching the gospel to others.

And then when they arrived at their home, what they did was committed themselves, they shared with those who had committed them to this work. And they concluded that God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

And I love this phrase, open the door of faith to the Gentiles, because it shows that this is God's work. God was working through them. A door is something you open to invite someone in, right?

So that's the door of faith. God is saying that the way you come into God's kingdom is through faith in Jesus. This is the door. You need to walk through it.

There's no open window that you can just jump in, you know, if you like. Neither is it an open field where, you know, just anyone can come in from any direction. No, there is a door that God has provided, which is now open to the Gentiles.

[18 : 43] And the idea of a door also suggests to me at this time that this work was only just beginning for Paul and Barnabas. It's almost as if that door has just been pushed open and Gentiles have started to walk in, right?

Invited in by the Lord through faith. And it's a bit of a trickle at the moment with Paul and Barnabas, but it's going to soon gather place. That is, the door will be getting open wider and wider and more and more Gentiles will be stepping through this door of faith.

And, you know, we've seen that in history, as I've said before, that soon after Paul, you know, over the centuries, the Gentiles have literally flooded into God's kingdom.

You, as Gentiles, have flooded into God's kingdom. And we look at the history of missionary, the missionary movement, we see stories upon stories forwarding these same patterns in Acts, doesn't it, don't we?

That there is bold preaching, there is opposition, persecution, and yet at the same time, God working through his spirit brings many into the kingdom of God through this door of faith.

[19 : 55] So over and over again, if you look at, you know, stories like William Carey in India or Hudson Taylor in China, that's why we've got a room called Hudson Taylor Room here in recognition of the work among the Chinese, because we've got Chinese congregations here.

And even God's work in Australia, spreading the gospel to indigenous Australians and in the South Pacific, all that is evidence of this pattern of God working over history, which he started in the life of Paul and Barnabas.

So I could give you lots and lots of examples, but I thought what I might do tonight is actually invite one of our return missionaries up to share, and, you know, Peter and Elspeth Young have been, I've been told, I've told today, they were not twice return missionaries, they're thrice return missionaries, so they've sort of done as good as Paul.

Paul also had three missionary journeys, and Peter and Elspeth may not be done yet, so they could be, you know, do one better than Paul, but anyway, let me invite Peter now to come. He's got a particular story to tell, and I thought it would be good for him to share it.

So Peter, take the podium, and I'll try and grab the other mic. So Peter, welcome, firstly, to share.

[21 : 18] If I'm not wrong, you've been to both Nigeria twice, and then to Thailand most recently, yeah, and both times with Elspeth, or three times with Elspeth, maybe explain that.

Well, initially, Elspeth and I were in Nigeria separately as single people, we met there, and, yeah, it was... Romance, blossom, you can't meet your wife and husband on a mission field.

Anyway, keep going, sorry, that was a side point. You might meet someone like me, though, so beware. So yes, Nigeria, first time, single, second time.

Yes, then we went back, and Stephen was one and a half. We were there from 1992 through to 2009, and then in 2016, we went to, Elspeth and I went to Thailand, and we got back just last year.

Okay. Probably describe briefly the two mission fields, any differences or similarities? Well, both, Nigeria and Thailand are extremely different from each other in just about every way.

[22 : 34] The church in Nigeria is a very vibrant and growing church. There is strong and violent opposition from Muslims.

About 40 to 45% of the population in Nigeria are Muslim, and there is some very violent opposition to the gospel. Thailand is different.

It's a very small church. There's been gospel witness for over 150 years in Thailand, and yet only about 1% of the population are Christian.

There is a lot of spiritual oppression. There's no violent opposition to the gospel, but it is very hardened to the gospel.

So, they're very different. And I guess in both senses there is still opposition. One's very active, the other one's passive, but still opposition. That's right. So, I did check with you, but you and Elspeth have not been stoned at all during any of your missionary experiences.

[23 : 44] Not in any sense of the word, no. No, okay. Nevertheless, you do talk about drugs later on, but anyway, there are, I guess, aspects of being on the mission field that you've experienced or seen hardship, and that's where your story comes in, I guess, the one that you want to share, so maybe why don't you do that?

Yes, okay, well, I thought that to illustrate aspects of hardship and suffering, I wanted to tell a story about outreach to a village called Tolotolua.

The story involves three different people who suffered in different ways for different reasons. So, first let me describe Tolotolua.

It's Tolotolua, there's a slide that shows a very bad picture of it. It's a village in the Sahara Desert, on the border between Nigeria and Niger.

So, Nigeria is to the south of Niger and the border between them runs through the southern part of the Sahara Desert.

[25 : 00] Tolotolua exists basically because of two reasons. Firstly, there's a well that actually has water a long way down and it takes a lot of work to get the water up, but it's in the centre of the town there's this well and so they're able to keep livestock and have little gardens, etc.

Secondly, Tolotolua is the border crossing for the trucks that are involved in the potash trade between Nigeria and Niger.

there. To get there you have to board one of these potash trucks. The end of the road really is about three hours south of Tolotolua and you get on this truck and when we went there it just headed out into the sand dunes and I wouldn't have known but we did, we came to Tolotolua for somehow the drivers know which sand dunes to go around and it all looked the same to me.

Anyhow, Tolotolua is hot, it's dry, it's dirty and it's impoverished. When our story starts there were no medical facilities there, there was just a trader who sold some pharmaceuticals, some illicit as well and so there was a big drug problem there there still is, as far as I know.

But there is little employment, no social welfare in Nigeria and it just was a pretty desperate place to live.

[26 : 54] 100% Muslim, absolutely no Christians, in fact most people who lived there had never heard of the name Jesus at all. people who were in the world.

So, the first person I want to tell you about is a lady called Nubwa. Nubwa was a or is a school teacher and when her husband died, she was, well, she refused to compromise her Christian faith and so the state education department, dominated by Muslims, sent her to Tolu Tolua as a punishment.

She had a 10-year-old daughter who she couldn't take to Tolu Tolua, so she had to be separated. So that was another aspect that it was a punishment for her.

The second person in the story is a man named John. John was an elder in our church where we were in Joss, many kilometres away from Tolu Tolua.

But he heard of Tolu Tolua through a prayer meeting that Nubwa happened to share at. And he and another friend who was a health worker decided to go to Tolu Tolua to share the gospel.

[28 : 31] They went and they were met with great hostility. They weren't given a place to stay. And that was a problem because they couldn't stay with Nubwa. She was a single woman.

They were unattached men. That wouldn't work. So they had to sleep rough out in the town square next to the well.

And they were spat on. They were abused. They were threatened with violence. It was very, very tough for them.

Nevertheless, they continued to boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus, just like we read Paul and Barnabas did. food. And they showed love.

They provided much needed medical care. And gradually, over time, they became tolerated. Then accepted and finally respected.

[29 : 35] the third person I want to introduce you to was a young man named Ali.

Ali was an Islamics teacher in the school where Nubwa was the headmistress. He was attracted to the message John and his friend were preaching.

and Ali used to sneak out at night to the sand dunes outside the town and read the Bible with John where no one could see them because he would get great opposition if they did see him.

He became a Christian and but when his brothers found out, they made a plan to kill him. Ali had to leave town.

He left his family, his friends, his life and for many years just couldn't go back. He came and actually stayed in our house for a time in Joss.

[30 : 52] So those three suffered a lot for the sake of the gospel. people. And yet there were also encouragements.

I guess the greatest encouragement is that now there is a Christian church in Tolu Tolua. There are believers. Nubwa hosted the early meetings of believers in her home and when she left Tolu Tolua and was able to live with her daughter again, the school was much improved from what it was when she got there.

And she was with John the one through whom the door of faith was opened in Tolu Tolua.

John was eventually counted as one of the respected elders in the town. When we visited Tolu Tolua we saw how the chief would come to him and consult him and get his advice and guidance on matters to do with the town.

John handed over leadership of the church to local believers after a couple of years and moved back with his family back in Joss.

[32 : 25] Ali is now married to a Christian woman and is working as a missionary himself in the desert regions of Niger to the north of Tolu Tolua.

His mother and at least one of his brothers have become Christians. so while there was great hardship there was also great blessing in that story.

Thanks Peter. I might just pray for them. Why don't you take a seat? Thank you. What a great story isn't it?

I don't know how far Tolu Tolu is away from Melbourne but anyway we are united with them in Christ aren't we? so it's great that we pray for them and thank them thank God for them for what a blessing they've been to us tonight just with that story.

So let me pray and then I'll close with just a final couple of words of encouragement. Father we want to thank you for this church in Tolu Tolu for Nubwa for John for Ali for calling them into your kingdom and then using them even right now to be your servants and we want to pray that despite hardship and yes we continue to read of persecution of the church in Nigeria and other parts of Central Africa we want to pray Lord that you will continue to strengthen them help them to stay true to the faith please raise up leaders elders pastors that can continue the work of teaching them the gospel and helping them not to be tempted to fall away from the faith and so we pray and ask this in Jesus name Amen Well let me wrap up then and I just want to bring us back to the text with two words of encouragement not too dissimilar from what Peter has shared and that is to just turn your attention back to verse 22 because the word that Paul brings to the church is this and we need to hear it and keep it in mind as we live our

[34 : 36] Christian life and what Paul says to them is we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God now Paul is not saying here that hardship is a condition for entering God's kingdom because faith in Jesus is the only condition to entering God's kingdom but what he's saying is that hardship is the normal experience of the Christian life that is if you want to remain in the kingdom of God then you need to expect hardship in this life to remain faithful in the gospel will often require you to go through hard times to stand up for your faith and notice here that Paul is not saying hardship is only for the missionaries that is for himself and Barnabas he was talking to the church all believers whether they're missionaries or not are to go through hardships for the gospel and so in the face of hardship Paul encourages them not to be discouraged it's not an indication that you're on the wrong track on the contrary when difficult times come and we've read in the New

Testament it is a time when the genuineness of your faith can be tested so that you can be found to be of pure gold and without that testing you wouldn't know would you so pressure or temptation come really to stop you from believing that is what the evil one wants of us instead what we're meant to do is to stay true remain true to the faith so the first point is hardship is the normal experience of the Christian life but secondly we are to take encouragement as well from this text because God gives us the strength through his grace to endure this hardship so I want you to go back all the way to verse three because there we see the key word of grace mentioned in that verse Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly for the Lord why to confirm the message of his grace that is it's God's grace that they're preaching because everything good in our lives including the gospel are gifts from God our faith our strength to persevere are gifts from God we're given that grace by the power of his spirit and then when they return to

Antioch in verse 26 notice what it says that it's described as the place where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed and so again as the church sent Paul and Barnabas out they knew that they were sending them out in the grace of God that it is God's grace that will enable them to complete their work which they have done so that it's God's grace even through hardship that will enable the door of faith to be open to the Gentiles and so brothers and sisters even though we are asked to endure hardship let's be encouraged to know that God's grace will be sufficient for us God will give us that strength to speak boldly for him as the opportunities arise God will give us the grace to keep teaching God's word faithfully even when there's opposition so to conclude I think

I want to draw us back really to the Lord Jesus himself because he too endured hardship not to enter the kingdom but for the sake of the kingdom isn't it and we heard that in that Isaiah reading today because our King Jesus he's the suffering servant and even as he endured the suffering he saw the joy and the hope that was set before him so verse 11 it says there he will see the light and be satisfied take joy in it and then the next verse therefore I will give him a portion among the great the hope of victory hope of riches and inheritance he will divide the spoils with the strong so the Lord Jesus himself had to endure hardship so what more us his servants and yet even when we do that we need to rest wholly on God's grace and know that it is by his grace that we will have that strength to complete or for

God to complete the work that he has assigned for us doing it in and through us let's pray father help us not to fear when we now hear these words from Paul that we are to go through many hardships to enter your kingdom instead encourage us to know that by your spirit and with the knowledge of your word we have grace to complete our life as Christ disciples bearing witness faithfully and steadfastly to the gospel strengthen us as your disciples as your church across the world so that we may complete your work and bring glory to your son in his name we pray amen