**Acts 13:1-4** **Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away. 4So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.**

Today is Homecoming. Last year, we celebrated 80 years in this church, as Old Lea Bethel, much longer when we consider that the church has been established since 1885. Today, we’re blessed, after a very difficult year that has produced many challenges, to be celebrating 81. It’s my prayer that everyone realizes the blessing of having a church home. Ultimately, it’s not the pastor that will decide the future of this church, but the people. It’s not his sermons that will propel the church forward, but their choice to serve.

There cannot be a Homecoming without there first being a Home Leaving. There has never once been a Homecoming that was not first preceded by a Home Leaving. To have the one, we must first have the other. Some believe that Homecoming is about the fried chicken, fellowship, friends, and family. But that’s not what it’s about. It’s about hearing the good report of those we sent forth to do the work of God. It’s about having Bobby Tate or Mike Whitt or others speaking of the progress of the Gospel based on the preparation our church provided. That is what Homecoming really means.

Today, we’re looking at the Home Leaving of Barnabas and Saul, soon to be renamed Paul. Verse 1 *Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*The church at Antioch was full of great teachers and prophets. It was growing, healthy, vibrant. People were serving and growing in the faith. In this church, the Gospel was all consuming, they were clinging to the Truth of scripture, they were engaging the community, and embracing ministry opportunities… but above all, they were avoiding becoming comfortable in their church. Comfort was not their goal; Christ was their goal. 357 days ago, I challenged this church with these very five things: Make the Gospel all consuming, Cling to the Bible, Avoid getting comfortable, Engage our community, and Embrace Ministry Opportunities. Churches that are on fire for Christ do these five things. Churches that are on fire for Christ have a whole lot of Home Leaving and enjoy many Homecomings.

Verse 2 *As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”* God uses growing Christians to grow the Kingdom. It was the Holy Spirit that called these two apart, to a work… not in the church. God will call away those He has a different work for. He separates people on fire to start new fires in other places, and that is just what we’re seeing here. It’s not the dead churches that are sending out the fire, but live and vibrant churches.

Verse 3 & 4 *Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.* This is the Home Leaving that will make the Homecoming possible. We cannot have one without the other. But notice how the church reacted to the calling away of two giants of the faith. Only after prayer, fasting, laying on of hands did they send them away. It was the Holy Spirit that called, sent Barnabas and Saul out, and the church was obedient.

Our hope is always to hear of the good news of the Gospel being spread far and wide due, in some small part, to the preparation this church provided. It’s time now to think of who will be coming home to tell us this good news in the years to come? How are we preparing those we will send forth to one day return to tell of the Kingdom? There can be no Homecoming without there first being a Home Leaving. Who will speak at Homecoming in the years that lie ahead?