

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Tenth Sunday After Trinity, August 4, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 37, 5:3, 132, 498, 498:6

Lessons: 2 Peter 3:14-28, John 4:27-42.

Sermon Text: Acts 13:42-52.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In Christ Jesus, dear friends:

To every lost sinner, Jesus says: “Come to me.” To every converted sinner, Jesus says: “Go for me!” Everyone who becomes a Christian is included in the work Jesus gave to his Church: ***“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*** Mark 16:15 Church work is proclaiming the Word of God. Church work is mission work. Mission work is not some incidental phase of the church’s work; it is the church’s work, the heart and center of her work.

The history of the early Christian Church, found in the Book of Acts, is the account of the Church doing the work of God by proclaiming the Word of God. That’s still the work of the Church today. We live in different times today, and thus the circumstances and opportunities are different, but the work is still the same, and the results of preaching the Word are still the same today.

Since every believer in Christ is to concern himself with the work of the Church, we want to learn from our text today about:

THE TWO-FOLD RESULT OF CHURCH WORK.

- 1. Some by their own fault reject the Word and are lost eternally;**
- 2. Some by the grace of God believe and have eternal life; and,**
- 3. Those who proclaim the Word both suffer and rejoice.**

The apostles Paul and Barnabas had been sent out from the city of Antioch in Syria by the believers in Christ. So Paul began his first missionary journey. Our text tells us what happened when they came to Antioch in Pisidia. Paul had preached a sermon to the Jews and the Gentile converts to Judaism there. In this sermon Paul reviewed the history of Israel. He told them how God had promised and sent a Savior from King David’s descendants. He told them how Jesus was not accepted as the Messiah promised to the Jews, and how Jesus was crucified and buried. He also told them how God raised up his Son Jesus from the grave. Most important of all, Paul preached this truth: ***“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.”*** Acts 13:38-39 Paul told them that in Christ God declared them free from sin and guilt.

After the sermon, our text tells us: ***“As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.”*** We are also told: ***“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.”*** When it was very evident that the preaching of the Word was being blessed, then the devil stepped in and began his dirty work. The church work of Paul and Barnabas was succeeding, and the devil couldn’t allow that.

Specifically, the devil caused the Jews to be filled with jealousy when they saw the crowds of Gentiles coming to hear Paul and Barnabas preach. One would think they would be glad that others could hear the Gospel and be converted, but they didn’t want the Gentiles to share their religious blessings. So they talked abusively

against the apostles, and in contradicting what they preached, they spoke blasphemy against God. It was God's Word they were rejecting.

This was pointed out to them by the apostles: ***"Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"*** The Jews who were jealous rejected the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah which Paul quotes in our text. Through Isaiah God said of his Son Jesus: ***"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."*** Is. 49:6 Jesus was sent first for the Jews, for Israel, but he was the Savior of all mankind, and the message of salvation is intended for all people in all nations.

Jesus explained this to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus on Easter Sunday afternoon. He spoke of the church work they were to do. He said that ***"repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*** Luke 24:47 Also just before his ascension, Jesus told the disciples: ***"...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** Acts 1:8 So also Paul in his missionary journey first preached to the Jews. But now that they rejected the Word of God, Paul and Barnabas told them: ***"Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles."***

What this teaches us is that the Jews were lost by their own fault. They rejected the Word of God and thus were responsible for their damnation in eternity. God had given them every opportunity to learn of their salvation in Christ, but they refused to listen. They had no one to blame but themselves for their damnation.

This is one result of church work today also. Some people, when they have the opportunity to hear the Word of God, deliberately cast it aside. They refuse to hear it, and thus are lost by their own fault. When this happens, there is nothing sadder in all the world. What could be worse than to suffer damnation in hell? Therefore, these words in Hebrews are so important for all who still have the opportunity to hear the Word: ***"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*** Hebr. 10:25 Are there some of our loved ones or acquaintances we should be encouraging to listen to the Word before it is too late?

There is also another result of church work of which our text tells us: Some by the grace of God believe and have eternal life.

2.

The positive result of the apostles' church work is mentioned several times in our text. The first was after Paul had preached his sermon, and we are told: ***"When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God."*** Many of the hearers thus had the opportunity to learn more and have their faith strengthened.

Then the next week almost the whole city came to hear the preaching of the apostles. And even though this grand opportunity was spoiled by the jealous Jews who spoke against the apostles, there was a good result of the apostles' preaching. The Gentiles found out that the Lord was now giving them the opportunity to learn of the Savior of mankind. Our text says: ***"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."*** The Gentiles, the people of the nations outside of Israel, rejoiced when they found out that they too could now hear about the Savior. Whenever the Bible tells about people from Gentile nations rejoicing to hear the Gospel of Christ, that should remind us of our own opportunities to hear the Gospel, and how we think of it. We are descended from Gentile nations. We are among the few who have been given an especially good opportunity to hear the true Gospel of Christ Crucified. Do we appreciate it? Do we rejoice in this? How do we show that we are happy to have this opportunity? The Gentiles mentioned in our text give us a good example. It says: They ***"honored the word of the Lord."*** They showed their respect for the Word of God by hearing it gladly, as Luther explains in the Third Commandment, that we should "gladly hear and learn it."

These people believed by the grace of God. That they gladly heard the Word with rejoicing was a miracle of God's grace. It was not something for which they could take credit. Our text says that ***"all who were appointed for eternal life believed."*** This speaks of God's eternal election of grace in Christ Jesus. These people believed

as a result of God's eternal election of grace. Paul says: God "*chose us in him (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*" Eph. 1:4-6 In Romans we read: "*Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*" 8:30 So, our salvation from beginning to end, beginning in eternity with our election, and ending in heaven to all eternity, is all by grace. It's all a gracious gift of God, for which we ought to thank and praise the Lord without end.

Finally, from our text we learn another two-fold result of church work: Those who proclaim the Word both suffer and rejoice.

3.

The suffering of the apostles resulted from their faithful preaching of the Gospel. "*The Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.*" They were kicked out of the area. This happened often in the ministry of the apostles. Soon after this, people from this same city of Antioch and from Iconium came to Lystra. We are told: "*They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.*" Acts 14:19 It is foolish on our part if we think there should be no opposition to the preaching of the Gospel in our day. When it happens, let us not be surprised. Nor should we try to avoid it, but rather concentrate on remaining faithful to the Word of God in all we say and do.

Paul and Barnabas were not intimidated by the unbelievers. Our text says: "*So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*" They could rejoice in God's grace in giving them opportunity to testify for their Savior, and to boldly shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against the unbelievers. They could also rejoice in the fact that the newly-won disciples for Christ were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

When we today have to suffer for the sake of our faith in Jesus, and suffer indignities because of the Word we proclaim, may we follow the good example of the apostles when they were persecuted. We are told that they "*rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name:*" And may we also continue to do as they did: "*They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.*" Acts 5:41.42

Let us pray: "*Lord of Harvest, let there be Joy and strength to work for Thee Till the nations far and near See Thy light and learn Thy fear.*" Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 507, v. 6.)

(Adapted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for February 8, 1987.)