

## Scripture Reading:

**Acts 14: “19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.”**

# "Rehearsing What God Has Done"

We come this morning to the end of what is often referred to as the first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul. While this is largely true, we must not make this the only focus:

- It was the Holy Spirit who said, “Set apart for me Barnabas & Saul for the work to which I have called them.”
  - It was the Church at Antioch that commissioned and laid hands on these men, sending them on the journey.
  - It was both Paul and Barnabas who made this important journey.
  - And as we shall see in a few weeks it even appears that this was not the first missionary work that Paul had done: He will return to churches that were likely established while he was in Tarsus during the next mission trip.
- So Paul and Barnabas return, to the Saints who obeyed the Spirit by commissioning them and sending them out, to provide a full report.
  - This is a journey that has really stirred things up as we shall see more clearly in chapter fifteen.

The first church council will be called in Jerusalem to consider the full impact of the Gospel going to the Gentiles and what role the old ways of Judaism were to play.

There will be growing tension between Paul and Barnabas as they prepare to journey again which will remind us that the Spirit of God is carrying out His work with broken vessels!

However, before we get to all that over the next two weeks, we have some important lessons to learn from our brief text this morning. Paul and Barnabas return to the Church at Antioch from which they had been sent. Luke gives us many of the details of the journey, including many port cities which he often did in his orderly account. *[mention how this has confounded the liberals]*

In verse 27 we are told that they first gathered the Church together.

Paul and Barnabas did not go only to the leaders of the Church or pick their favorites to give a special briefing too.

- The joy of seeing what God had done was to be shared by all!
- It reminds us of the importance of our gathering and community!

As we gather each week for worship and our fellowship lunch we should hear again and again what God is doing to fill the earth with the Kingdom of His Son in our day.

- Remembering that the Spirit filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus IS the story of the Book of Acts and that this story continues down to our day!

In a way, we are gathered together after being sent out the week before in our time of commissioning to the mission journeys of our lives. We certainly all have sins to confess, but we know they are covered by the blood of Jesus so we can continue to faithfully serve the Lord. With our worship and in our time of consecration with the Word, prayer and our gifts we are encouraged about all that God has done and receive new instructions for another journey.

We are then strengthened for this journey here at the Lord's Table, reminded that Jesus has obtained the victory and then we are sent forth or commissioned for another journey. If we rightly gather again next week, we too should give God ALL the glory for what He has done during the week.

This is the second lesson that we see here in verse 27: "They declared all that God had done with them."

- They will go on to declare the victory that God has had in opening a door to the Gentiles so they are declaring the trip a success.

An honest question to ask would be whether we would have done so as well? Would Paul and Barnabas have talked only about the good highlights and skipped the tougher parts? I don't think so: I think the text says what it means and means what it says.

- They declared ALL that God had done with them, including teaching them some hard lessons.

They would have rehearsed not only the exciting accounts of conversions among the Gentiles, but also the contentions with the Jews, the false worship of the Gentiles, the various persecutions and even the tension that began to build between Paul and Barnabas over the actions of John Mark.

- Would we have included all of that in our report?
- Would we have indicated that it was part of ALL that God had done with us?

**These Apostles gave God the glory for all that He had done!**

Sadly, not only do we tend to only focus on the good things BUT then we even try to take credit for them!

I truly stand before you as one of the guilty parties this morning! When pastors gather one of our common questions is "how is your ministry going?"

- To ask or answer such a question is to violate what we are taught here in verse 27 and I have often been very guilty here.

Not only have I been guilty of asking such a question, but have often answered it without question:

- Oh, I can make it sound good by saying something like, "The Lord has really blessed our work!"

It should break our hearts to think of how it grieves the Holy Spirit when He hears such talk among the Shepherds!

I am guilty on the family front as well: While it is certainly proper to rejoice when God blesses our families it was troubling to reflect this week on how often I have simply declared that I have twenty-two grandchildren! I should not be ashamed nor too proud to declare that God has blessed Linda and I with these grandchildren.

- This missionary journey began and ended with the focus on God and we must learn to do the same in ALL areas of our lives!

As we gather and declare all that God has done each week, or at other times in our lives, we need to beware of those ditches on the side of the path of righteousness once again:

- The ditch on one side is the ditch of despair where we focus only on our failings!

When we gather it is proper to have our time of confession and ALL of our failings and shortcomings need to be honestly confessed: This is why we have a time of individual and corporate confession.

- Our sins are to be brought to the cross AND they are to be left at the cross.

When an officer of the Church says “Arise and receive Good News” we are to do just that. We are to hear the Gospel and respond to the Gospel as we are called into the very presence of God: We are now clothed in the righteousness of Jesus and can actually “come bless Jehovah” as commanded in Psalm 134 which we sing at this portion of our service. We also anticipate God’s blessing as well which is why we lower our hands to a position of receiving such blessing... And we should be excited as we sing and think about being blessed by the Creator of heaven and earth.

IF we believe that He spoke everything that exists into being out of nothing, how can we possibly think that we have some problem or sin that is too big for Him to handle? This is a glorious road to travel and it is sad to see some who veer into the ditch of despair by dwelling only on their sin and refusing to hear the Good News!

The other ditch is even more dangerous and can put us in risk of hell fire itself: That is to ignore our sin or to think lightly of the forgiveness that is offered in Jesus. This can be caused by neglect where we do not think it is important to heed God’s call to gather together, it can be caused by pride where we don’t think that our sin is serious or by embarrassment where we avoid thinking about our sin.

All of these prevent us from being properly renewed in worship and prepared for another week of service and if left to fester can leave us in the precarious position of the Saints at Laodicea who had become lukewarm and were warned, “because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

Our goal must be to travel the path that God has graciously placed us on, remembering our journey began with His grace, continues with His grace and will end in His grace. This is the important lesson to learn from our text this morning: In verse 26 Luke reminds us that the Apostles were “commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.” They were sent out knowing that anything they accomplished would be the result of God’s grace!

In verse 27 they “declare all that God had done with them.” As Paul would later write to the Church at Rome, “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, the just shall live by faith!” Paul explains this more fully to the church at Ephesus when describing the glories of the Good News:

“8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

- Paul and Barnabas had been saved by grace and set apart to do God’s work by the same grace!

God does not just clean us up and then send us out to see how well we will do in our own strength...

- God cloths us in the very robes of Christ’s righteousness and sends us out in the power of the Spirit to do the works we were created to do!
- Our struggle is to believe that!

We read the Law of God together this morning, as we often do, and still it is so easy to forget the introduction, just as our Jewish forefathers did:

- “I am Jehovah your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

We are still tempted to think of the Ten Commandments as the way that we are to please God... To prove that we are worthy of being called His children. NO, the picture in both the Old and New Testaments is that God delivers us by His power and then sends us out to do His work in that same power! The nation of Israel was not to prove to the other nations how good they could be: This is sadly what they often thought and it led to many failures and much pride. The nation of Israel was to be the envy of the other nations as they saw how God delivered them by His grace and taught them to live by His grace:

- Such thankful and faithful obedience was to be a blessing to the other nations!
- And where the nation of Israel failed, Jesus the Messiah would not, coming to live that life of faithful obedience and giving Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of His people!

This is reflected in the lesson we see here with Paul and Barnabas: They were sent out by the grace of God and now rehearse ALL that God had done with them:

- The struggles, the persecutions, the trials and the victories were all seen as part of God’s plan.
- The focus of their report is on what God has done and that should be our focus as well...

IF we truly believe the words we love to quote from Romans!

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”

- IF we believe this, then we should not fear to “rehearse” on ALL that God has done...

This includes our victories and our defeats, our obedience and our sin, our joys and our sorrows, the sun that shines upon us and the earthquake that shakes us!

- Do we understand how God works all of this together for our good?
- Of course we cannot: Today we at best see through a glass darkly.

We might think we can figure some of the little stuff out: Like when some tension or crisis in a relationship leads to more maturity in that relationship or an illness or tragedy brings someone closer to God... But try to get your hands around how the sin of abortion fits into God’s plan for our nation or to understand all of what He is doing with the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

We must also remember that in all of this God sees the end from the beginning & does not have the limited perspective that we must deal with:

- Our limitation is not just a matter of scale, like an earthquake or volcano that can impact millions but also the reality of time.

For example, let’s pretend you had wondered into Galilee during the ministry of Jesus. While there you heard a couple of teachings from Jesus, watched a miracle or two and then saw Him rebuke Peter by saying ‘get thee behind me Satan’ after which you returned home.

- Would you have ever thought Peter would play as big a role as he did in the early church?

Or if someone saw the progress of the early church at the time of Stephan’s stoning: How the Saints fled and how Saul of Tarsus went in hot pursuit...

- Would they have thought the church was going to succeed?
- Would they have picked Saul as the Apostle to Gentiles who would write a third of the New Testament?

**This is why even the Apostle Paul must in the end must declare, “ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord?"**

**So, I want us to consider two practical applications from our text:**

**First and foremost, how would you give a report of all that God has done in your life this past week?**

**This is something we need to learn to do on a weekly basis as we gather for right worship: It is an important and essential part of our being the Body of Christ & functioning as a community.**

**This is not the only place for such reports: As we gather for our annual meeting we will consider what God has done with Church of the King in the past year. The men who just traveled to Russia for the intensive courses will now return and give us a report of all that God did with them in Russia.**

**This also should apply to our daily lives: Reflecting on what God did in our lives the day before should be a part of our morning devotions so we can better understand what He would have us do in the upcoming day.**

**There is a TON of counseling and books that focus on the troubled relationships that we have today. Struggles between husbands and wives or between parents and children or even employers and employees... What would happen with strained relationships in any of these areas if the affected parties took some time to discuss TOGETHER what God has been doing & what He is planning to do in their lives?**

- **When they realize they might need more wisdom and guidance...**
- **It is all right here in the Book!**

**And the other practical lesson that is taught by these Saints here can help people who are struggling with various tensions as we all must at various times**

- **Men who don't feel that they have enough time for work and family**
- **Wives who feel overwhelmed by the various responsibilities of home-making and child rearing**
- **Young people who struggle to determine how best to spend their time and talent preparing for the future**

**Well, when considering these tensions, listen to the final verse in our text:**

**“And they remained no little time with the disciples.”**

**Just as we saw the Apostles return to the young churches for support and to appoint Elders last week... now they remain in Antioch for an extended period of time. It is interesting that Luke does not specifically say if it was so they could be strengthened for the trials and journeys that lay ahead or if they stayed to minister to the Saints. I am sure there was some of both, BUT what we must see is that they realized that they must spend this time here.**

**There was an ENTIRE Gentile world to evangelize and yet they made the decision to stay “no little time” there in Antioch where a strong church was already established. How did they know they were supposed to stay and when did they know they had stayed long enough?**

**The answer is the same one that I must give a father who asks how much time he needs to spend each week talking with his fourteen year old son... Or the answer for a mother that wants to know what time they need to get up in the morning to make sure all their duties are completed... Or for the young person trying to decide what vocation is right for them!**

- **The simple and correct answer is: Seek the Lord's wisdom and follow the Spirit's guidance!**

**Now before I am accused of being too simplistic or too charismatic I want to leave you reflecting on one of Psalms in our morning readings from this past week... Yesterday in fact.**

**Psalm 56 is a Psalm David wrote when he was in BIG trouble with the Philistines: David said men were ready to swallow him up and that his many enemies oppressed him and hounded him all day long... Sound familiar?**

**I would argue that he looked to the Lord in just the way I have suggested:**

- **David sought the Lord's wisdom and was led by God's Spirit!**
- **And young David did so in the same way we should today: Trusting God and seeking the wisdom of His Word! *[Of course we need to remember that David had only the early books, perhaps only the books of Moses... The first five!]***

**“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? All day they twist my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather together, They hide, they mark my steps, When they lie in wait for my life. 7 Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God!**

- **David then goes on to pen some of the most comforting words that we have in the Scriptures for us in our times of struggle and despair:**

**“You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book? When I cry out to You, Then my enemies will turn back; This I know, because God is for me. In God (I will praise His word), In Jehovah (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You, For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, That I may walk before God In the light of the living?”**

**Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”**

- **May we always rejoice in declaring what God has done with us as we walk in that light.**

**Communion Meditation: John 1:**

**“7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**