

INI

St Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th St. SW
Austin, MN, 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
sermon preached on-
April 28, 2013
4th Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35
Hymns: 1; 769; 761; 800

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Acts 13:44-52

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" 48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Crucified and Risen Savior, dear fellow
Redeemed

INTRO: The Distress at seeing the Spiritual decay in America.

We love our country. I am quite certain that everybody here agrees that the United States of America is the best country in the world to live in. Along with the rest of America, we were shocked and dismayed by the terror attack that happened in Boston. Along with the rest of America, we struggle with understanding how anyone could hate America so much that they would set off bombs to kill and maim innocent people gathered for this special event.

And yet that is not the only thing that upsets us about what is happening in America. As devout Christians we see the spiritual decay that has set in and has undermined the proper teaching of God's Word in so many of our churches. Many hesitate to identify any corrupt behavior as being sinful. Along with this we see a moral decay in our society that we know is detrimental to so many people, and to our nation as a whole. We see many reveling in the new liberty to express their "inner self" with corrupt behavior, to their own spiritual harm. When devout Christians speak out against such blatant sin, they are often accused of being hatemongers themselves. It doesn't seem to matter that one speaks the truth in love, hoping for repentance and praying for salvation for those who are caught up in sin.

The world around us wants us either to join them in celebrating sin, or to keep quiet, which we know we cannot do. The Lord Jesus taught the disciples that they should expect nothing less than this animosity from their own nation and people, a nation and people whom they loved every bit as much as we love America.

We read in John 7:7 **"The world ... hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil."** Jesus also explained to the disciples the night before He died.

John 15:18-20 18 “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

But we also read in our Gospel lesson this morning that we are to love one another. More than this, we are to live in love and peace with the world as much as we are able. We are commissioned by Christ to proclaim the gospel of His love and forgiveness to all the world, beginning with those right around us. We are to call the people of our own country, as well as the rest of the world to repentance. It would be easier for us to keep silent here in America, where we would feel the heat for being professing Christians, and limit our witness to foreign lands. But that is not what the Lord expects of us. He expects us to be a light set on a hill, not one covered with a bushel basket. He expects us to act as a preserving salt in this world, which means we will live sanctified lives to the glory of Christ, and we will speak out against the rot that is evident in our society around us. But we will also declare to all penitent sinners the marvels of the gospel, which alone can remove the blight of death from people’s souls, and bring them new life and salvation. So we find ourselves exactly where the Lord has placed us, doing what the Lord has called us to do:

Theme: Proclaiming the Gospel in a Hostile World.

This being said, we should not be shocked to find ourselves

I. Facing Hostility.

Hostility is exactly what the Apostles encountered, and not just on the rare occasion. This hostility to their message was consistent right from the very beginning of their apostolic ministry. It was there whenever the Word was proclaimed and heard. What we see in our text is that this hostility was not limited to their work in Jerusalem and its surrounding environs. It followed Paul out on His missionary journeys, and again right

from the very beginning. The events of our text took place early on Paul's first missionary journey, in Antioch of Pisidia.

Acts 13:44, 45 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

Envy, jealousy, vanity! How often these faults and frailties get in the way of the gospel. First Paul had spoken the gospel to the Jews in synagogue. He declared to them a wonder of grace; the words of the prophets had found their fulfillment in Jesus, in His crucifixion and His resurrection from the dead. In all this Paul declared to them “**glad tidings.**” He declared to them all:

Acts 13:38-39 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; 39 and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Here was hope for life! It was received with joy and rejoicing, especially by the Gentile converts to Judaism, for –

Acts 13:42 “When the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.”

These Gentile converts were excited and shared their excitement with others, so that the next Sabbath there was a great crowd gathered at the synagogue to hear Paul, and the gospel which he preached. And that is when the hostility started. The Jews were envious of the response Paul's message received. But it wasn't Paul's. The gospel came from God to free all men from sin and death. But the Jews allowed their feelings, and their pride to get in the way. They responded with hostility. They blasphemed, they contradicted Paul. They opposed his message. They did all within their power to undermine the preaching of the gospel. They refused to hear Paul, but in refusing to hear Paul it was not Paul they were rejecting but rather the Lord. Paul and Barnabas didn't allow that to silence them. They turned to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:46-47 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Paul and Barnabas were not intimidated into silence. They grew bold! They basically said, if you don’t want the gospel, and refuse to hear and be saved, then we will turn to those who will hear, even as the Lord said. Of course that didn’t end the opposition. Later on the forces of evil grew worse, as they potted against Paul and Barnabas.

Acts 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

The Jews put a plan together that was successful in getting Paul and Barnabas kicked out of town! But even that didn’t defeat the Lord. The Lord was successful in accomplishing what He desired with the proclamation of the gospel!

There is an important lesson for us about -

II. Knowing the Power of the Gospel.

Acts 13:48-49 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

The Gentiles were glad to hear that Paul and Barnabas weren’t going to cave in to the pressure of the Jews and keep silent. They were glad to hear more about Jesus, and how He died for them and rose again. And the Word which Paul and Barnabas presented brought wonderful results. **People believed!** All those whom the Lord had appointed to eternal life believed. You see it is just as the Apostle Paul later wrote to the Romans.

Romans 1:15 -17 “So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.””

The gospel has power to change hearts. The gospel is the power of God. It is a comfort and assurance that the power is not in us, or in our powers of persuasion, but rather with God who works in hearts, calling people to repentance and faith, so that the righteousness which comes to us from God might be credited to sinners who were ensnared in the darkness of sin and death. And it isn't haphazard, or hit and miss, though it may appear that way to us at times. God is accomplishing exactly what He desires to accomplish. We simply need to persist in presenting this glorious truth of a crucified and risen Savior to the people around us and throughout the world. The Lord will do the rest. He promises us that. So Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 55:11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

The results are not only known to God, but are evident in people's hearts -

III. Being Filled with Joy and the Holy Spirit.

That is what we need to take home with us. We possess this joy, and have been given the blessing of the Holy Spirit dwelling within our hearts!

Paul and Barnabas were not dissuaded from their mission even in the face of great hostility. They were expelled from the city! They didn't let that rob them of **the joy** they had in sharing the gospel with others.

Acts 13:51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium.

They went on to another town, and joyously started preaching the same glorious message there. And sure enough, they would find both a receptive audience and then also hostility there as well. What is not to be forgotten is that there were many sinners who were saved. There were many believers who were blessed. Our text assures us of that.

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

There were many believers who knew the joy of the gospel in their hearts and were filled with the Holy Spirit as a result of the faithful preaching of Paul and Barnabas.

This is a great and important lesson for us. We mustn't let the world and the hostility it generated rob us of the joy we know in our hearts because of the grace and love of God that comes to us in the gospel. When one group refuses to hear the gospel, responding with hostility, even calling us bad names, we should not, indeed we **must** not be deterred from sharing the gospel with others. **Keep the joy alive!** Remember the power and presence of the Holy Spirit who abides with us also. Speak the truth in love with the confidence that the Spirit will use the gospel we share to work in the hearts of those whom the Lord knows as His own, those whom He will call to eternal life.

The Lord is our Light and our Life and our Joy. No one can take that away from us. And as we go forward to share this good news with others that joy will only be enhanced as we see others filled with that same joy of believing, and knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.