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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 14, 2017
4th Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: 1 Peter 2:4-10, John 14:1-12

Hymns: 20; 355; 759; 50:2 (248:1-3)

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

Sermon Text: Acts 17:1-12

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ²Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." ⁴And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

⁵But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. ⁶But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. ⁷Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus." ⁸And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. ⁹So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

¹⁰Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the

Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.
¹²Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the
Greeks, prominent women as well as men. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, our ever living Lord, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Building our Faith with the Resurrection Message

These Sundays after Easter in which we give special emphasis to the message of the resurrection are important for each of us. This is more than a time when we are rejoicing that Jesus rose from the dead. This is a time when we are looking at the significance of that message for our own faith and life. We focus on the truth of gospel of God's love and forgiveness being secured in Jesus' resurrection. Jesus as our living Lord assures us that our debt has been paid and that we have peace with God in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection assures us that resurrection is real, and that we too shall rise. Jesus has gone before us, but He shall come again and receive us to Himself, as we read in this morning's gospel lesson. Last week we focused on the wonder and comfort of knowing Jesus as our Good Shepherd. Only as our risen and ever living Lord can this wonder of grace be our comfort and assurance. Jesus cares for us in all our ways, yes, even unto eternal life.

This morning we return to a part of the message that we spoke of on Easter Sunday, the mission that was first given to the women who went out so early to the tomb and there were told by the angel to go and tell that Jesus has risen from the dead. In our epistle lesson this morning Peter wrote of how Jesus by His resurrection fulfilled the Scripture making Him the chief cornerstone. Immediately Peter reminded us all that we are now built into Christ's Church as living stones. As living stones we have a purpose and function, to take up the message of our Lord Jesus, just as Jesus laid it out in our gospel lesson. We are to be telling others of our crucified and risen Lord being the way, the truth and the life by which we may come to the Father.

This is the message that was also entrusted to the Apostle Paul. The Holy Spirit uses Paul as example for us --

THEME: Spreading the Good News of Living Savior.

Paul's example shows that --

I. The Scriptures Reveal Jesus as the Christ.

Our text takes us forward in time past Pentecost and the conversion of Saul to the Apostle Paul. We are joining him on his second missionary journey. So quite some time has passed since the excitement of Jesus' resurrection. One might assume that the apostles' zeal and fervor for the message may have cooled down. We see that this was not the case. As Paul traveled he looked for opportunities to share the gospel with the Jews first, and then also with Greeks (Romans 1:16).

So in our text we are told how Paul sought out the synagogue in Thessalonica, and for three consecutive Sabbaths he attended their services and spoke to them about Jesus being the Christ. It is important for us to pay attention to the details of how the Apostle proceeded. We are told that Paul reasoned with them, but this wasn't a debate to see who could develop the most articulate argument and prove themselves smarter or more astute than the others. What Paul did is very reminiscent of what Jesus did on the way to Emmaus on Easter evening. When he spoke to those two disciples Jesus showed them *from the Scriptures* why it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and die and rise again. So our texts reports:

Acts 17:2-4 "Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned with them from the Scriptures**,³ explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.'⁴ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas."

The message of a crucified and risen Savior is a message that is presented throughout the Scriptures. The Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled *in Jesus*. Paul used these Old Testament prophecies

because in them the message of gospel is clearly presented; and it is through the preaching of the gospel that the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of those who are called to believe.

And what do you suppose happened? It's amazing but true. It's amazing and it is dependable! Some of them were persuaded, that is some of the Jews gathered at the synagogue for worship were persuaded that Jesus is the Christ who was promised of old, and that He is the one by which we must be saved. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God!" (Romans 10:17). It's amazing that the hearts of the Jews who had been misled by their spiritual leaders to look for an earthly political Messiah, or to look only to their own fulfillment of the law for righteousness, that they were persuaded that life and salvation are to be found in Jesus as the way, the truth and the life!

More than that, this message had attracted gentiles to listen also. There were almost certainly proselytes to the faith of the Jews present in the part of the synagogue sectioned off for gentiles who believe; but great multitudes? One might assume that the word went out and that these Greeks brought others to the synagogue to hear this wondrous message which Paul presented as he consistently reasoned with them *from the Scriptures* presenting the truth of Jesus, our crucified and resurrected Lord, for the forgiveness of sins.

Now this is what the Lord would have us learn from Paul. We have the Scriptures. We know that the Old Testament Scriptures find their fulfillment in Jesus. We have the New Testament Scriptures as well. In the gospels we have the message presented time and again showing this very truth that Jesus is the Christ who fulfilled the promises of God, who came to die and rise again to save us from sin, death and the power of the devil. In that message we have "*the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes*" (Romans 1:16).

But then Paul's example also shows us that --

II. The World Takes Offense to this Truth.

We read of what happened in our text:

Acts 17:5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Jason is a Greek name. Jason would have been one of the multitude of Greeks that believed. It appears that Jason took Paul and Silas into his home, either to stay or to teach, or both. The Jews gathered a bunch of evil men to start a riot, and they barged right into Jason's house looking to grab Paul and Silas, and drag them before the local officials and get them in trouble. It was an ugly scene; one might have been quite frightened and intimidated. Perhaps it would lead one to think twice about being a disciple of Jesus. However this wasn't the case. They did not turn back away from the Lord.

Christians should understand and expect that among the unbelievers of this world there will be anger and hard feelings, and resentment against the gospel. That is what comes of our sinful human nature, and that is exactly what the devil works within the heart of man. Jesus taught His disciples that they should expect nothing less than that. We read Jesus' words in Matthew's gospel:

Matthew 10:24-25 "A disciple is not above *his* teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *will they call* those of his household!

We know that they ridiculed and despised Jesus, and accused Jesus of being in league with the devil. We should expect nothing less. Remember that Peter referenced the Scriptures in our epistle lesson this morning that Jesus would be found a rock of offense. So we will be criticized. We will be called names. We may even suffer harm for the gospel's sake. Does that mean we should feel bad? Does that mean that we should keep quiet? NO and NO!

Remember what Jesus taught at the conclusion of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² **Rejoice and be exceedingly glad**, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

And that is the example the apostles set for us. We read in –

Acts 5:40-42 “When they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.”

The apostles received a beating. A beating from the Jews meant 39 blows to the back with a wooden rod. It had to hurt, and hurt bad. With the beating came the command that they no longer speak in the name of Jesus. They did not go home feeling sorry for themselves. They rejoiced that the Lord had counted them worthy, *counted them worthy* to suffer shame for Jesus.” And then they continued right away, and right there back at the temple where the council had arrested them and beaten them, teaching and preaching Jesus. That is the power of a Risen Lord living in their hearts. That is the power of the risen Christ that lives in your hearts also!

May we know the power of our living Lord in our hearts! May the Spirit strengthen us that we might be found worthy to suffer shame for Jesus, that we might possess such faith that we rejoice in suffered for Jesus’ sake. May we be bold in our testimony, for then shall --

III. The Scriptures Prevail for the Salvation of Souls.

The Spirit prevails!

Acts 2:10-12 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things

were so. ¹²Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.”

The brethren helped Paul and Silas evade capture. They moved on to Berea, the next city fifty miles down the road, and there they preached the gospel in the local synagogue. They didn't hide. They didn't consider it a mistake to include their fellow Jews, their fellow countrymen when they talked about Jesus. It is evident that Paul didn't change his formula for presenting Jesus. *It was all about the Scriptures.* In Berea the people opened the Scriptures daily, DAILY, looking to make sure that what Paul was teaching them was found in the Scriptures. Paul wasn't afraid of that. He welcomed it. The Holy Spirit characterized the people of Berea as being more fair-minded.

The result was overwhelmingly positive. The Spirit works through the Word, so the result was wonderful. Many believed, including again both Jews and many Greeks, and prominent women, for the Lord desires all to be saved both Jews and gentiles, both men and women.

What a wonderful encouragement this is for us. This is what the power of a risen Lord is to be in our lives also. We should be confident in sharing the Scriptures with our neighbors, no matter what their ethnic or religious background. We have the Spirit's promise given to Isaiah:

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 Lord will bring success. The Lord works through the Word. We may not always see it like we would like, but the Lord accomplishes what He pleases. We need to be ready. Peter tells us in his first epistle:

1 Peter 3:15 “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”

We need to work on the spiritual dedication of our hearts. We need to be deliberate about keeping the Lord first in our hearts and lives. We need to work at being ready to tell people about the hope we have in a living Savior. We need to remember some of the scriptures we memorized in the past, or memorize them now for the first time. We need to stay in the Scriptures daily, and to take special note of the connection between the Old Testament the New Testament, remembering that the connection is Jesus. The prophets wrote about the Christ, and Jesus came and fulfilled all for us and for our salvation. He lived, He died, and He rose again, and now He lives forevermore that we might have life in His name. The reason you are here on the face of this earth is so that you can go and tell others about Jesus who is the reason for the hope that is in you.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)