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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 3, 2017
13th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 56:1,6-8; Matthew 15:21-28

Hymns: 235:1-5; 245; 776; 50:2

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

Sermon Text: Romans 11:13-15, 28-32

¹³For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them. ¹⁵For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?

²⁸Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers.

²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. ³⁰For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³²For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: The world is very evil.

Yes, one might make an argument that what we have seen in the past week with an outpouring of help and generosity for the victims

of Hurricane Harvey that the world is a pretty good place, and that people are overall pretty good. And of course we not only want to encourage and commend such kindness, we thank God for this response from across America. However, appearances can be deceiving. The greatest deception of all is that all this kindness shows that man is good enough to be allowed into heaven, that man's righteousness surely must avail before God. People have turning out by the thousands, opening their hearts, their homes, their businesses, and some even risking their own lives to help rescue others, doesn't make these people deserving of entering into heaven. That sounds harsh, but the righteousness of man is at best flawed by self-glorification. Our righteousnesses are as Isaiah described them, no better than disgusting, filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

Of course in the response of even many of these individuals we have also seen glory given to the Lord, that their kindness flows from faith in Christ and so they love their neighbors as themselves because Christ has loved them. For that we praise the Lord!

At the same time that we see news reports about kindness done to some people in one part of our country we see other reports about hate groups hating, beating, even killing people they think deserve it because they do not agree with their view of other people, their view of the world. In recent weeks there was a report of a man allowing people to suffer and die in his semitrailer because he didn't want to get caught smuggling people into the country. Even locally we hear reports of people shooting other people, selling drugs, and many other crimes. These reports don't even include all the sins, most sins that are so common among us that they don't make the news. The Lord looks down on this earth and declares, *"There is none who does good, no not one!"* (Psalm 14:3)

So what should the Lord do about all this evil? In the end we know there will be a judgment. Some people call for judgment right now. Some people seem to want others they regard as being evil sent to hell as expeditiously as possible. What does the Lord want? After all the Lord is in control, even if we may forget that from time to time. But, if God is in control what's going on? On the basis of our text this morning the Spirit would lead us to --

THEME: Behold the Wonders of God's Grace!

In our epistle lessons in recent weeks we have read of Paul's zeal for the salvation of his fellow Jews, his own beloved countrymen. The Lord had specifically called Paul to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Fulfilling that mission Paul traveled from city to city in Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey, preaching the gospel of Christ our crucified and risen Savior. Paul always looked for the local synagogue where he would share the good news that the Christ had come and salvation was secured as the promises of God were all fulfilled. Time after time the Jews listened at first, but then turned away from the truth of the gospel. Paul consistently continued to preach, turning to the gentiles, and the numbers of those who believed grew.

Was Paul disappointed that the Jews whom he loved as his fellow countrymen rejected the gospel? Yes of course he was. Was Paul disheartened by this rejection? No, and this is where we see the Lord turning evil to serve His blessed purpose of salvation. We see

I. Rejection Turned to Reconciliation.

Paul expressed it very simply when he writes, "*their being cast away is the reconciling of the world.*" (v.15) The gentiles who heard the same message the Jews were rejecting were called to faith by that message. It wasn't that they were smarter than the Jewish audience. Even as the Jews were offended by the message of the cross because it did not allow for righteousness by the works of the law, the Greeks found it to be foolishness because it presented one man as the propitiation for the sins of all, and that by His death! And then the gospel declared Jesus to have risen from the dead?! As Greeks who were proud of their wisdom they found this gospel of Christ unacceptable. And yet God used the foolishness of the message preached, the same message that was rejected by both Jews and Gentiles, to be salvation for those who believed. God's purpose of salvation for sinners was advanced, advanced gloriously, advanced not to the glory of Paul or his audience, but to the glory of God.

We need to observe how the Lord took occasion to save the Gentiles of this world when the Jews spurned the gospel and so

were rejected for their unbelief. The Lord turns rejection by some to reconciliation for others. “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.*” (2 Corinthians 5:19) And it is by faith in Christ Jesus that this reconciliation, this atonement, this glorious peace comes to us who are being saved, to us who are called by the gospel.

If the Lord was doing that then, we should understand that the Lord continues to turn the circumstances of this world, including the immorality and unbelief of modern society, into opportunities for the advancement of the gospel in this world. As we see America allow the gospel to slip away in favor of popular morality and reason and political correctness and work righteousness, we also see how the gospel is prospering in the foreign mission fields. Thousands upon thousands are hearing the gospel in these distant lands and rejoicing in their salvation in Christ Jesus. The gospel isn't being defeated by the apostasy growing in America, it is being turned into an opportunity for reconciliation for vast numbers of precious souls in India and Africa, and Nepal, and wherever the Lord our God has blessed this proclamation of the gospel.

It is a glorious thing. Paul was so enthusiastic about the advancement of the gospel among the Gentiles that he says in our text that he “magnified” his ministry. This wasn't about an ego trip for the Apostle. This was about broadcasting the wonders of God's grace as salvation was made known among the Gentiles. This was about letting everyone know how God loves and saves the sinner of every race and nation. One of the reactions to Paul's ministry among the Gentiles that needs to be noted is the jealousy of the Jews. They wanted God to themselves. They didn't like the attention Paul was giving the Greeks. They didn't like the joy and enthusiasm that the Gentiles showed for hearing the gospel. But they also witnessed the power of the gospel to save. This too God was determined to use to His end and purpose of salvation of souls.

II. Envy Is Turned to Zeal for the Lord.

Paul wrote, “*I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.*” (v.13,14) Paul didn't dismiss the Jews, and no longer try to present the truth to them. Paul remained steadfast in his confession which is the

theme of this epistle to the Romans. *“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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”* (Romans 1:16-17) That would always characterize Paul’s ministry in every city he visited. He would reach out to the Jews and then go to the Gentiles hoping to incite jealousy that would turn to a zeal for the Lord. He wanted his fellow Jews to possess that assurance of salvation, that peace of conscience, that hope of everlasting life that filled the hearts of the gentile believers with such joy and excitement. Paul was certain that this was also the will of God for the Lord’s desire for the sinner to be saved does not change. *“God so loved the **world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should **not** perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3”16)

So it should be among us yet today. One of the comments that is commonly heard among our CLC members that go on Mission Helper trips is how excited it made them for the gospel when they saw the joy and excitement the gospel brought to the people in whatever country they visited. They desired that same zeal for the gospel, and the Holy Spirit enlarged their hearts. This is what Paul wanted the Jews he encountered to experience. He wanted them to be jealous of that excitement and peace and joy.

This is what we should convey to the people that surround us in our hometown and in our nation. When they see us as Christians they should be jealous of the excitement we have for the gospel, jealous of the peace we possess, and the joy and the comfort and the hope, and that glorious relationship with our Savior God. If we convey that then the Lord will open doors for us to share our faith, and the Spirit will open hearts of others to believe.

Because America, like the people of the Jews has neglected the gospel, with many even forsaking it, such a turn of events would be, as Paul expressed it in our text, *“life from the dead.”* (v.15) Can one hope for such a miracle of grace in our nation? Yes because the Lord assures us that --

III. Disobedience Is Turned to Mercy for All.

Romans 11:30-32 “As you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”

When we observe blatant disobedience to the Word of God we are tempted to despair. We are tempted to think that we need to find better candidates for gospel than these wretched sinners we see around us in the world. One of God’s purposes for the law is to make people rebel even more, to make people utterly sinful. God’s purpose is not to promote sin, not at all! It is however to bring people to the realization of their own sinfulness. The law shows us our sin; it reveals the absence of righteousness. That is when people are ready to despair of attaining salvation by their own efforts and works. They realize that it simply cannot be done. It is as Paul wrote earlier in this epistle:

Romans 3:19-20 “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, **that every mouth may be stopped**, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore **by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight**, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.”

When people finally know their sin, when they finally understand that they stand condemned before the Lord, and then see **your** peace, the peace and joy that comes with faith in Christ, then they have been prepared by the Lord to hear that gospel for themselves, and the Holy Spirit will be present to turn that heart to faith in the Lord.

That is the fruit which our Christian life and our Christian testimony is to produce. It is such a vitally important aspect of our lives as children of God. So then let us not despair as witnesses for Christ. Let us not draw a false conclusion about our own nation that the Lord has given up on America. The saving will of God is irrevocable. It stands as true today as it did when Paul wrote these words, as it did when Christ died and rose again for us and for our salvation.

“Lord, I believe were sinners more Than sands upon the ocean shore,

Thou hast for all a ransom paid, For all a full atonement made.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 371:5)

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. (Romans15:13)