



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 6, 2007

5th Sunday of Easter

Acts 13:44-52

Pastor David Rockhoff

First Lesson: Acts 13:44-52

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 145

Second Lesson: Revelation 21:1-6

Gospel: John 13:31-35

Some Things Never Change

There is an old saying that says, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." I think there is a lot of truth to that saying. Think about the changes that we experience and how quickly things change. That is true whether you are talking about automobiles or televisions or computers—you buy one of those things and before you know it, it is almost outdated as soon as you buy it. Then there are changes in music, and clothing, and how we wear our hair, and customs, and fads of all kinds. I wonder what people who lived 100 years ago would think about how we live our lives today based on how things have changed over that period of time.

But things stay the same, too, don't they? Kids are always going to be holding out their hands asking their parents for money or the car keys. The sun is always going to rise in the east in the morning and set in the west in the evening. Spring is always going to follow winter. And a dog is always going to be man's best friend. So there are a lot of things that will never change.

That is a true statement when we think about the situation that Paul and Barnabas found themselves in as it pertains to the Word of God and as we think of our situation some 1900+ years since then. As we consider that situation that Paul and Barnabas had as to ours, let's keep in mind that some things never change. That is true when we consider that the Word of God is meant for all people, and it is also true when we consider that it will be rejected by some but also believed by others.

God's Word for today shows us and helps us to see that Paul and Barnabas were in a town called Antioch. There were two Antiochs. One was just north of the land of Israel, but this Antioch where they were at was even farther north and way to the west in the area of Asia Minor. They were on what we have come to know as Paul's first missionary journey. Paul made four journeys in the later years of his life, and this was the first one. During this journey, they went from town to town and village to village talking to people about Jesus and who he was and what he had done for them. That just follows that old saying that some things never change. In this case, it is the fact that the Word of God is meant for everybody.

So as they got to this Antioch in this area called Pisidia, they really did what they were accustomed to doing. Whenever they came into a new city, they first found the synagogue. Most cities had synagogues because the Jews were no longer just living in that Promised Land of Israel, but they had over the years now, since Jesus had ascended, they were now scattered in the various other areas of the regions. And many

of them were now taking up residence in the different towns and villages of those regions. So the synagogue was where they worshipped, and that is where Paul and Barnabas always went first. They would preach to the people there.

That is what they did when they got into this Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath that they arrived, they went into the synagogue, and there they preached to the people. After they did so, the people invited Paul and Barnabas to come back. They were more than happy to come back the next Sabbath day to preach again. And in between that time, we are told that Paul and Barnabas talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

So the week in between these two Sabbath days was not an idle time. It was a very busy time for these people. We are told that these people went and they told others. They told others to come to the synagogue to hear what Paul and Barnabas had to say. And that is what the people did. They went and they invited their friends, their relatives, their neighbors, people they met at the well, people they met out in the pastures, people they met at the city gates, people that they met in the market places. They went, friend to friend, neighbor to neighbor, relative to relative, and we are told that on that second Sabbath day, almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord. The Word was getting out. Again, some things never change. Maybe there is a method in what these people did that you and I can also do as we get that Word out, friend to friend, neighbor to neighbor, relative to relative.

We are told that there was a great response. There was a standing-room-only crowd in the synagogue on that second Sabbath day. It is very possible that the numbers were in the hundreds. What a blessing that must have been, right? How we also wouldn't long to have our churches filled each and every Sunday with a standing-room-only crowd and yet, we find that that doesn't happen as often as we would like—maybe on Christmas, maybe on Easter, but not always in between.

Yet, even in this case, it wasn't the great joy that it should have been. We are told when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. There was a two-fold problem that the Jews had with what had happened here. The first problem was that they didn't fully believe what Paul and Barnabas was telling them. They didn't fully believe in the fact that Jesus was their sole Savior from their sins. They couldn't accept this free forgiveness because they were bent on the idea that you had to keep those Old Testament Laws as part of your salvation.

The second problem they had was this fact that the Gentiles were believing what Paul and Barnabas had to say. These Jews weren't quite ready to admit and to allow these Gentiles into this same relationship as God's chosen people. They had a hard time allowing the Gentiles to receive this same label that they had—to be a special people and to be that special people based on faith alone. But for the Gentiles, this was awesome news. Luke 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 (Acts 13:48)*. The Gentiles rejoiced! They praised God for this message that they had now heard. The door to salvation was now wide open for them which had only been opened up a

little crack up until this point because they too, like the Jews, had been led to focus on the Law and what they needed to do in order to be saved, and now they were focused on what Jesus had done for them as their means for salvation.

So how were Paul and Barnabas then to handle this situation? This joyful yet potentially explosive situation—with the tensions of the Jews matching the joys of the Gentiles—what were they going to do? What were they going to say? Luke says, *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’”* (Acts 13:46, 47). Their reply was rather bold and yet also very simple.

They simply said, “We had to preach to you first. That was God’s plan—that we bring the message to you as God’s special people. And yet God also wants us to go into all the world and share the Word with the Gentiles as well.” It was that very vision and mission that they were able to speak about as they used a prophecy from Isaiah 49, as God the Father prophesied what Jesus would do when he said, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (see Isaiah 49:6). Jesus was to come into this world and bring salvation to the ends of the earth. God’s grace was full and free for all people. The work that Jesus would come to do was so great and so amazing that it wasn’t to be limited. It wasn’t to be something that was just reserved for one nation. Some things never change. The Word of God was meant to all.

That is something that we also know to be true when we think about what Jesus told the disciples right before he left this earth. He commissioned them to go to all people when he said, “*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). So Paul and Barnabas were doing that. They were going to the Jews, but then they were going to the Gentiles as well, because some things never change.

The Word was meant for all, but we also see that some would reject it and others would believe it. And as we conclude this story, that is exactly what we see. Luke says, “*The word of the Lord spread through the whole region*” (Acts 13:49). It was believed by some. He also says, “*But 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. 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*” (Acts 13:50-52).

Notice how far this rejection of the Word by the Jews went. They even took legal steps so that Paul and Barnabas would be opposed, causing them to have to leave Antioch and to go to the next city. Paul and Barnabas did that. Luke uses the phrase “they shook the dust from their feet.” It simply meant that they were removing any responsibility for what would happen to these people from themselves. They would have nothing more to do with them because of their rejection of what Paul and Barnabas had told them. But then Luke also says, “They were filled with joy and the

Holy Spirit.” They knew that there was another city to go to and more people that they could share that Word of God with.

We spent a little bit of time now talking about an event that happened some 2000 years ago. So the question that we might want to ask ourselves is, is there any relevance for what happened there? Is there any relevance to today, to this, your congregation here in Morrison in the year 2007? I think there is. Think again of the theme for today—some things never change. The Word is meant for all. It will be rejected by some, but it will be believed by others.

Today it’s not Paul and Barnabas, it is Pastor Rockhoff, just for today, but Pastor Ott in this congregation, or Mr. Humann, or any of the other Bible leaders and teachers that you have who teach you. We are not in a synagogue teaching Jews and looking for Gentiles. We are in a church building and a school teaching Gentiles. We are teaching other people outside of our family of believers. The Word is meant for all.

That is true whether we are talking about children, boys and girls, or older people, men and women. God’s Word is meant for all people. That is why we have the opportunities to hear God’s Word and to study God’s Word that we have. Whether we are talking about worship, whether we are talking about a Christian day school, or Sunday school, or Vacation Bible School, or Christmas for Kids or Easter for Kids, whether we are talking about the many Bible study opportunities that are on your calendar each and every week—and believe me, you have many of them as I looked at the schedule for the week—that is because God’s Word is meant for all people. What opportunities you have to hear and learn more and more about what Jesus has done for you so that you can also see that God’s will is that you can live for him—today, talking about loving other people by sharing the Word with them.

But think about also how God’s Word is meant for all people when you think about mission opportunities. And I am not just talking about sending missionaries halfway around the world that we can pray for, that we can give our offerings for, although those are important too and you do that as well. Think about the mission opportunities that God gives to you—friend to friend, neighbor to neighbor, relative to relative. There are certainly people in your own circles that you can share that truth of God’s Word with because God’s Word is meant for all people.

The Word is meant for everybody. We can also think of that in context with Fox Valley Lutheran High School and Manitowoc Lutheran High School—opportunities for secondary Christian education for our teenagers that God has given to us. Again, your congregation is in both federations and you support both of those high schools with your prayers and with your offerings. What a blessing they are as they not only can instruct our high school children, not only for future ministries as pastors or teachers, but they also instruct them in the truths of God’s Word so that they can become young adults and Christian leaders in your congregation.

How important it is that we remember that God’s Word is meant for all. I pray that you don’t consider your congregation as a private club only for a select few. It is meant for all people, and that is why you want your congregation to be something that is attractive

to all people. Now I'm not just talking about the grass being mowed or the walls being painted so it looks good. I am talking about a congregation that has an attractive message. I'm not talking about one that just makes you feel good like some of these mega-churches want to present and preach by telling you that you aren't really all that bad because everybody makes mistakes now and then and God loves everybody. But that attractive message includes the message of sin. The realization that we are sinners and we do go against God's will, but we have the message of the gospel—that we have a Savior who doesn't change, a Savior who came to live and die and rise again to take away our sins so that we, through faith, will receive that crown of life, that eternal life in heaven that God has won for us. That is the message that is attractive that we want to continue to preach that will not change and that we continue to hear and learn so that God's Word can also guide our lives so that we live for him and give glory to him in all that we do as his children and as we share that saving and eternal message with others in our lives.

We also want to have facilities that allow us to carry out the ministries that we have. Again, in your congregation here, how you refurbished your place of worship, how you are building on to your school—how important those tools are so that you can carry out the work that God gives you to do. These are the kinds of things that make your facilities and your message attractive to others—messages that they need to hear, a message that will be rejected by some and believed by others because some things never change.

We can be assured that that is going to happen. As Jesus spoke about the last day of this earth, he said that there will be two groups of people—the goats and the lambs. The lambs are the ones that he will say, "Come take your inheritance"—those who believed in him during their life. The goats are the ones to whom he will say, "Depart from me you who are cursed"—those who did not believe in him during their life on this earth.

And Jesus also said, *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned* (Mark 16:16). There will be no fence riding on the Last Day. Some will be saved—saved for eternal life in heaven—others will be condemned for eternal death and damnation in hell. That assurance really causes us to do two things. First of all, knowing that, we may rejoice. May we rejoice and give thanks to God for the successes of his Word that he allows to happen and that he allows us to be a part of. We have to remember that God does use us in his whole process of salvation. He uses us to plant a seed and then the Holy Spirit uses that Word that is followed and used to make that seed grow.

But then let's also remember that we want to keep trying. The success ratio that we have in sharing God's Word isn't going to be 100%, but that doesn't mean that we give up easily or that we stop trying. We need to continue to encourage and invite and share that Word of God with others.

When it is rejected, there might come a time when we too have to shake the dust off our feet and look for somebody else to share that message with, but when we do,

understand that as we plant that seed, God is going to make it grow. Why? Because that is the way it has always been, and some things never change.