

I.N.I.

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2013
Acts 11:19-30

In Christ Jesus, upon whom the Christian Church is founded and after whom we are named, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The disciples were first called “Christians” in Antioch. What a marvelous name to have and to carry. What a privilege to be named after our Lord and Savior. What a responsibility to bear that name. But what better place for the believers in Jesus Christ to be called Christians than in the church of Antioch. For from our text this morning we see that—

ANTIOCH WAS A MODEL CONGREGATION!

Our text takes place after the persecution broke out in Jerusalem against the Church following the stoning of Stephen. In the first verse of our text we see that these believers were scattered as far away as Phoenicia, the island of Cyprus and the northern Syrian city of Antioch.

At first these converted Jews spoke the message of Christ crucified and risen again only to the Jews in these places. But our text then says that some of the men from Cyprus and Cyrene also spoke the Gospel message among the Gentiles in Antioch. And what an effect it had. We are told **AND THE HAND OF THE LORD WAS WITH THEM, AND A GREAT NUMBER BELIEVED AND TURNED TO THE LORD.**

These Gentiles were not like the Ethiopian we learned about last week. He was a proselyte—a Gentile who had already come into contact with the LORD Jehovah and believed in the coming Messiah.

These Gentiles were pagans, unbelievers. Some who no doubt worshipped the mythical gods of the Greeks and Romans. They now were being shown, probably for the first time, the true God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and the one and only Way to redemption and salvation—through Jesus, the Christ.

As Christianity and the Gospel message marched from county to county it broke down those ethnic barriers which had been placed between the Jews (God’s originally chosen people) and the rest of the world.

So great was the work in Antioch that the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas, a God-fearing man full of the Holy Spirit, to Antioch to work among these converts. Barnabas in turn went to Tarsus to find Saul who had been converted by the Lord some almost 10 years earlier.

During those 10 years, the Lord was preparing Saul, who later changed his name to Paul, preparing him to be His chosen instrument to carry His name before the Gentile world. Now the years of waiting were over for Paul. Almost 10 years of preparation was now at an end and a call from God came. Preach Christ to the Church of Antioch!

We see Paul’s patience as he waited on the Lord for 10 years, but we also see Paul’s fervor as he jumped into this ministry working for the Lord. We are told that Paul and Barnabas worked for a year in Antioch teaching, gathering, strengthening a congregation who for the first time were called Christians.

Christians, those whose entire hope of salvation rested in the power of Christ’s death and resurrection. Christians, those who are led to a heart-felt sorrow over their sins, godly repentance and who look alone to Jesus for forgiveness of those sins. Christians, those who are led to a life of self-denial and a bold confession of the Lord Jesus before the ungodly world.

Do these definitions of a Christian apply to us? In fact does this model congregation at Antioch apply to us?

That is the question that makes up our sermon theme for this morning:

Are we of Peace Thru Christ a “Model Congregation”—like Antioch?

Lets take another look at what we know of the Antioch church. First of all we see that it was:

I: A CONGREGATION WITH GOOD NEWS FOR ALL!

In the first verse of our text we are told that the message of the Good News of Jesus was proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles alike. The message of Christ crucified and risen again was the foundation stone upon which that congregation was built. And this message was not told to only a select few, but to all.

Peace Thru Christ began with a sincere desire to preach Christ crucified and risen again, not any man-made interpretation, not synod decrees, or church ordinances, but the Good News of the whole Gospel. And that desire and effort is still being carried out today, by God's grace.

But is it being carried to all people? Are we as Christians bringing that saving message to everyone, or are we being selective in our speaking of Christ? Am I as pastor negligent in my reaching out to all classes of people, to all ages and to all social and economic levels in my effort to bring the saving Gospel to **ALL THE WORLD?**

Are we as a congregation too concerned about home needs that we are not supporting our nationwide, or worldwide mission efforts as well as we can and should. We have so many opportunities in Nigeria, India, Nepal, Myanmar, Congo, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Are we praying for and supporting our Immanuel Lutheran High School, College and Seminary from which pastors and teachers in our name go out and proclaim a once sacrificed and now living Jesus to a spiritually dead world?

These are questions which I as a pastor, and we as a congregation need to ask ourselves. For our past failures we need to bring them with repentant hearts to our Lord and for the future work we need to look to that same Savior for the strength, commitment and courage to support and to proclaim that message to ALL.

II: A CONGREGATION WITH A MINISTRY FOR ALL!

In the middle verses of our text we see that Paul and Barnabas ministered to great numbers of people during that year. It was a growing church, a growing church not only in numbers, but in service, in ministry to each other.

Is ours a congregation in which we minister to all? Are we as concerned for our elderly of this congregation as we are for the young? Do we exert as much effort in our service to the individual as we do for the family? Are we all as concerned for the inactive member as we are about the active member? Is our congregation a well rounded congregation in this sense—service to all groups, sexes and ages?

Here again we need to ask ourselves these questions and then ask "if not, why not and what can I do about it." Am I supporting our congregation's efforts in these areas with my prayers, my time, energy, talents and efforts? Am I involving myself by attending the Bible classes and Evangelism meetings or am I doing nothing but showing up on Sundays or worse being one who complains that nothing is being done but than not doing anything about it?

May the Holy Spirit fill all of our hearts with a renewed zeal to dedicate ourselves individually and as a congregation to this task of supporting the Gospel work in or midst among all!

Do you know another reason why the church in Antioch was such a model congregation? Because the words they heard, learned and believed filled their hearts with love.

III: A CONGREGATION WITH A HEART FOR ALL!

In the last verses of our text we hear of the people's selflessness. They gave, each according to his ability to provide help for the brothers and sisters in Judea who were in need because of a famine. When Christ's love fills the heart, it cannot be hid. It will overflow in love to each other and to all.

Once again we need to ask: Is our congregation one which not only talks about Christian love but expresses it? Do we practice Christian love in our relationships with each other as called pastor and teacher and members? Do we practice Christian love as member toward member; as members to our church officers, Sunday School teachers, our church organists? Do we show our Christian love toward those who are visitors in our church services and to all of those outside of our congregation whom we meet in our daily lives?

We pray that the Holy Spirit fill all of us with the love of Christ that we show that selfless love toward each other, toward our neighbors, friends, family members and strangers.

Only with a continued hearing of the Word can ours be a model congregation, one in which Christ rules and lives, and the power of His resurrection is seen in what is accomplished to the glory of His name.

A congregation of fellow believers eager to come to hear His Word consistently and regularly.

A congregation of believers willing to come an hour early to hear and learn in our Bible Class and Sunday School.

A congregation of believers desirous to come as often as possible to partake of the Lord's Super for the blessed assurance of the forgiveness of our sins and strengthening of our faith.

A congregation of believers lovingly reaching out to each other with forgiveness, concern and help in times of sorrow, grief or need.

A congregation of believers supporting the teaching of our young in our Christian Day school and Sunday School.

A congregation of believers that shows their love for their Savior in their up keep of His church/school building and the grounds.

A congregation of believers who financially supports the work of the Gospel both home and abroad to the best of our ability.

A congregation of believers who individually and personally speaks to others about Jesus and tells them that Jesus did die as payment for our sins and did rise again to assure all of us of a resurrection to eternal life and then invites them to come and hear.

And a congregation of believers who readily admit, from the heart, that we are but sinners, unable to earn salvation, unable to stand before God on our own, but proclaim boldly and clearly that we redeemed, blood-bought sinners who in the victory of Christ's resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit will continue to grow in grace and knowledge of His love which will be evident in the fruits of faith.

May this be the blessed example we show to the world and may this be the wonderful results of the Spirit's influence upon our hearts through His Word. In Jesus; name we ask.

Amen.