

Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 8th, 2022

Reading I – Acts of the Apostles 13:14, 43-52

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia.

On the sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats. Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God.

On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said.

Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.

For so the Lord has commanded us,
*I have made you a light to the Gentiles,
that you may be an instrument of salvation
to the ends of the earth.”*

The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord.

All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region.

The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory.

So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium.

The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 13:14, 43-52. In today’s passage, Luke continues the story of the Holy Spirit working to grow the early Church. It’s important to remember that the early followers of Jesus were Jews and continued many of their Jewish practices, i.e., going to the synagogue on the sabbath. While on mission at Antioch of Pisidia, we

see Paul and Barnabas attending the local synagogue and creating quite a stir there. In addition to attracting many Jews (some of whom were Gentile converts to Judaism) by their preaching, they also created a conflict between themselves and the Jewish leaders. They were so successful that whole town came out on the following sabbath! This popularity made the Jewish leaders jealous, causing them to adamantly contradict what the two disciples were saying about Jesus, and they became “violently abusive.” Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas spoke out courageously and told the opposing Jews that they were meant to have the word of God spoken to them first, but since they are rejecting it, they are bringing condemnation on themselves as unworthy of eternal life. The two publicly declare that they are now turning to the Gentiles to preach the word. The Gentiles eagerly received the word and came to faith, but the Jews called upon influential people of the city to join a movement to persecute Paul and Barnabas. They expelled them from the city. Following the words of Jesus, they “shook the dust from their feet” and moved on to a new area to preach the word. They were filled with joy and continued to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Questions/Comments: Isn’t it interesting that the message of Jesus created a negative reaction in people who were so rigidly set in their religious beliefs and practices that they couldn’t see and accept that the Spirit of God was at work in the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. Remember the opposition that followed the implementation of Vatican II? As Pope Francis continues the synod, the Holy Spirit will call us to new ways of being Church. Just as there was opposition to the Second Vatican Council in the late 1960s, what kind of resistance might show up in the results of the synod? The Church in Germany is already calling for the blessing of same sex unions, ordination of women, inviting divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Communion, and intercommunion with other denominations. If this is truly the work of the Holy Spirit, might this cause some to dig in their heels and say, “Enough!”? Might some of these changes contribute to a new openness to those who have been marginalized and cause our numbers to increase?

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5

R (3c) We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;

serve the LORD with gladness;

come before him with joyful song.

R We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Know that the LORD is God;

he made us, his we are;

his people, the flock he tends.

R We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

The LORD is good:

his kindness endures forever,
and his faithfulness, to all generations.

R We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Reading II – Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude,
which no one could count,
from every nation, race, people, and tongue.
They stood before the throne and before the Lamb,
wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.

Then one of the elders said to me,
“These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress;
they have washed their robes
and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“For this reason they stand before God’s throne
and worship him day and night in his temple.
The one who sits on the throne will shelter them.
They will not hunger or thirst anymore,
nor will the sun or any heat strike them.
For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne
will shepherd them
and lead them to springs of life-giving water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17 - The book of Revelation was written around 96 CE around the end of the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, who persecuted lots of Christians. John, is the acclaimed author of the book of Revelation, as he is identified by name. Scholars pretty much agree John was not the actual author.

The style of the book of Revelation is apocalyptic. This style of writing was very popular between the timeframe of 200 BCE to 200 CE. It used many images of animals, numbers, etc. symbolically to convey messages of faith and hope. Therefore, it is VERY VERY important to NOT take ANY of this LITERALLY! In order to understand the context, one must realize that this book, like any book of the Bible, was written for a specific community in a historical time. A lot of the imagery describes a tumultuous time for the Christian church as it was under heavy persecution. By learning about this time in Christian history we will get a better appreciation for the images we see. Ultimately, this book was to solidify faith and give us hope that indeed Jesus as the risen “Son of Man” will defeat death, and the vision of heaven described will come to fruition. This theme is a perfect example of why Revelation is relevant to today.

In our reading today we enter into the section of the book called the “Visions of Cosmic Conflict.” In this section of the book its many images have led people away from the main point the book is trying to get across. The one central message is the good people on earth are in the midst of a battle with evil as it is manifested in its many different forms. It conveys this message through the use of poetry which again helps the reader gain a sense of hope that faith in God does reap eternal rewards. This is especially true for the people described in this reading who have “survived the time of great distress.” Because of their faithfulness they stand in white robes, which are signs of purity and innocence. They forever stand in the presence of God who “shepherds” them and provides them everything they need.

Comments/Questions: Put yourself in the place of the people who are reading this story. During the reign of Domitian in 81-96 CE Domitian put thousands of Christians to death or banished them without trial. To put it bluntly Christians were under heavy persecution. So, put yourself in their shoes. What would their reaction be when they read this passage? Does reading this passage do anything for them? Does it do anything for you? When you read this can you apply any current events that are happening today?

Gospel – John 10:27-30

Jesus said:

“My sheep hear my voice;

I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

No one can take them out of my hand.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,
and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand.

The Father and I are one.”

John 10:27-30 – John was written around 90 – 100 CE by several different authors. The book itself, like the book of Revelation, is highly symbolic and uses different literary components. It is different than the three synoptic Gospels as it emphasizes Jesus in his divinity as the Son of God. This is called high Christology.

The story we read today comes from the section of the book titled, “The Book of Signs” (John 1:19 – 12:50). These signs, or the miracles of Jesus, are opportunities for people to see God’s love through Jesus working in the world. They were used as gateways for people to eventually come to full faith in Jesus. Jesus in this story is giving a response to the Jewish leaders who are asking him to be clear with them and say out loud that he is the Messiah. Jesus questions this need by making references to his “signs” which testify for him (John 10:25). He concludes with them that they don’t know him as the Messiah because they have not yet come to faith in

him. Those who have faith in him are like sheep in his flock. Sheep know their shepherd and will follow them. In turn, the shepherd protects their sheep at all costs. The passage ends with the Jewish leaders wanting to stone and kill Jesus, but Jesus escapes.

Questions/Comments: Sheep are interesting creatures. I watched a YouTube video about four people who tried to call a flock of sheep. Three different people in a row tried unsuccessfully to call the sheep together. Then the farmer called out to the sheep, and the sheep looked up and immediately came as a group to the farmer. Jesus' description of sheep is perfect. Sheep intimately know the voice of their leader and follow them when they call. If sheep know the voice of their leader, they know how to discern which other voices not to listen to. In a world filled with lots of "noises" how do you keep your focus on the voice of Jesus? How do you discern which voices to listen to?