

Sunday Sermon: January 22, 2017

Sermon Text: Acts 13:38-49

Sermon Theme: Preach God's Word to all people

³⁸ *“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:*

⁴¹ *“ Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.”*

⁴² *As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.*

⁴⁴ *On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.*

⁴⁶ *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. ⁴⁷ 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.”

⁴⁸ *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

⁴⁹ *The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.*

There are many different types of fishing. There is the fishing we do for fun. We have the favorite, secret sport on the river or lake. We have our favorite hat or fishing gear. We have the favorite pole and lure and we enjoy the time we spend whether we catch any fish or not.

There is sport or trophy fishing. Someone might charter a boat with a fishing guide who will have all the right equipment in order to catch the big one that will go on the wall.

There's long-line fishing where commercial fishermen will set miles of line in order to catch fish like tuna.

Finally, there's net fishing. Net fishing is one of the oldest types of fishing styles and is still very common today because it works. Instead of targeting just one specific fish, the net is thrown and catches as many fish of all different kinds. This provides the largest catch with the least work.

When Jesus said his disciples and followers would be fishers of men, he was using an analogy that they already knew and understood. Some of the disciples were fishermen, but fishing, and especially fishing with a net, was such a common sight that the rest of the disciples would have understood what Jesus' picture meant: The nets of God's Word were to be cast far and wide to many different kinds of people in many different places. These nets of God's Word were cast to catch the souls of men.

In our lesson this morning, we see Paul and Barnabas casting of the nets of God's Word. As they preached the Word they did not worry about which type of people they cast that Word to, they continued to preach, casting that Word to many that they might believe.

The time of the early Christian church was not a peaceful time. There were many who did not want this teaching to continue. The Jews, with Roman backing, had set out to silence the Christians by arresting them and even killing them.

This doesn't sound like the perfect circumstances for the growth of the Christian church, but it was. God worked even through this persecution to have his church grow and flourish in amazing ways. Jewish Christians fled from Jerusalem and Judea, taking the Gospel with them, and settled all over the Roman world. Little pockets of Christians were here and there, but they did not have anyone to preach to them. They didn't wait for someone to send them a pastor. They would join together and worship with one another in their own house. They formed their own small congregations to worship their Savior together.

It is into these conditions that God sends his missionary, Paul, to bring the news of Jesus to build up those who believed and to turn the hearts of unbelievers to him.

Our sermon text is actually the 3rd stop of Paul's ministry in a place called Pisidian Antioch. Why would Paul go there? Paul had been a Pharisee. He knew the workings of the Jewish religion in and around Judea. It is also likely he knew where Jewish synagogues had been built. Jewish synagogues were not just churches for preaching and teaching, the synagogue would also have been a vital cultural and community center for all things Jewish.

The Jewish people who would come to the synagogue for many different reasons. In a Roman world, filled with Roman things, these synagogues provided a taste of home for the people who were so far from Jerusalem. Some would come to worship in the Jewish way. Others would come for social reasons, to be with other Jewish people, to speak Hebrew with one another. It is also likely that there were Jewish Christians who would come to the Jewish synagogues for these social reasons.

On this first journey, Paul would often go cities that had large Jewish populations just like Pisidian Antioch and search out their synagogues to preach to the people there. When Paul comes to this synagogue, the leaders realize that he and Barnabas are visitors. They ask if he will speak some words of encouragement to him.

Paul begins the sermon from our sermon text long before verse 38. He begins by drawing in the Jewish people by using what they know in order to teach them about Jesus. Paul begins his address with the words, **“Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me.”** With these words Paul casts the net of the Word to all people who are in the synagogue that all might listen to his message and believe.

As was customary for a Jewish sermon, Paul lists the history of God's goodness and mercy to his people going back to the Egyptians. During this section of Paul's sermon, the Jews in the crowd would have been nodding their heads in full agreement with Paul is saying, but then Paul's sermon changes.

Paul teaches them that God's love and mercy has been revealed. God had sent his Messiah, Jesus. Even though God had been faithful, the Jewish leaders had rejected the Messiah and had even killed him. There was good news, what they tried to kill, would not remain dead because he is the Son of God. He has overcome death and gives forgiveness and eternal life.

This would have been the part of the sermon that would have made the people sit on the edge of their seats. Paul telling them that their leaders in Jerusalem had not only rejected God and his promises, but had killed the Messiah. Paul could not be right.

Paul continues to cast the net of the Word. ³⁸ **“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: ⁴¹“ ‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.’” ⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. ⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.**

Notice the net Paul uses is made of the Law and the Gospel. Paul preached pure Gospel. Jesus brings forgiveness of sins to all people. He brings forgiveness in a way that the law of Moses never could. But he also preaches Law: be careful that you do not become like those scoffers in Jerusalem and reject this Savior.

Paul casts the net, but the Holy Spirit does the work in the hearts of the people. When Paul finishes this sermon, the faith of the people shows through. They follow him and want to hear more. They begged him to come back to preach more. When was the last time that happened here at church? Pastor, tell us more.....

Paul casts the net of the Word to many people and see very different reactions. The Gospel message spread so quickly during the week that the next Saturday, **“almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.”** The Jews, on the other hand, were not filled with faith and joy, they were angry at this message: **When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.** Paul preached the Gospel, but some rejected it.

It has been said, if God really loved us, he would just take everyone to heaven. While that statement seems logical to us, it does not fit God's perfect love or perfect justice. God does not force anyone to believe.

He offers his Gospel, his forgiveness and salvation to all people, as here, Paul offered the Gospel message to all those in the synagogue. But often our response can be the same as the people standing there. Some have joy and comfort in the message of the Savior, while others are filled with anger over even parts of this message.

When God directs us to cast the net of his Word, He does not ask us to be concerned about the response. Yet, there are times that we have trouble casting that Word as we should.

What kind of fishermen are we? What kind of methods do we use? Do we target specific people with the Word? This is not a horrible strategy, but then we must ask ourselves why? Why this person and not that one? Why this age group and not that? Why didn't we target that person? Often the answers we find in ourselves are not all that good. Maybe we don't want that kind, age or quality of people here. Maybe we want to keep our church the nice family feel we have and that kind of people would throw things off. Maybe we can't hear quite so well when the babies cry or the children rustle, maybe we are scared of the stereotypes of who people are and where they may come from. Maybe we have just concluded in our minds that these young people won't listen to God's Word anyway.

Do any of these reasons help or hurt the casting of the Word that we are told to do? Paul cast the net of the Word to all those people in the synagogue, Orthodox Jew, Gentile convert to Judaism, Christian convert and everyone in between. He knew there would be opposition, but he did not let that stop him from sharing the Word. He did not target only those people who would listen to the Word, he trusted that the Holy Spirit would do his work despite those who opposed him. And God did just that.

⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷ 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.'" ⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

God provided many fish in the net. It might not have been the ones that Paul expected, or was even praying would listen and believe, but God worked in the hearts of people who believed when they heard the Gospel message. The Gentiles rejoiced in a Savior and then they too went and told others. They cast the net of the Word and the Word spread throughout the region.

Even though our sin and fear may stand in the way of casting the net of God's Word far and wide, God promises to bless it, not always in ways we understand and know, but sometimes in unique and unexpected ways that we could never expect.

May we pray that we are faithful in our proclamation of God's Word and that we cast his net of that Word to many people in our lives. Amen.