

**“You Won’t Believe What Happened!”**

**Acts 14:8-20**

**First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu**

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Have you caught it yet? Or for some of you, are you tired of it?

It being “Olympic Fever” of course. I have to confess, Cathy and I are both Olympic junkies. Our DVR is about to burnout from the past two weeks. Matter of fact, this sermon almost didn’t get written. Good or bad, there is only one week left.

The Olympics this year are being held in Sochi, Russia. Probably not as confusing as the Vancouver 2010 Games. You know, Cathy and I lived in Vancouver for 21 years before moving to Hawaii. Unfortunately, we were here in Hawaii in 2010 so we didn’t get to see any of the games in person. That actually was true for a number of people. I’m talking about those people who flew to Seattle and hopped on the train to Vancouver, only to show up in Vancouver, WA, where we used to live, three hours south of Seattle. Unfortunately, the Olympics were being held in Vancouver, BC, where we never lived, that is located three hours north of Seattle. People didn’t realize there are two different Vancouvers, both located pretty near each other. People would get off of the train in Vancouver, WA and ask where the Olympic venues were and people would just smile. So sad!

Of course, only Cathy and I would then choose to live in Kailua. Many of our friends were excited that we are going to live on the Big Island and I didn’t know what was wrong with them.

As we continue to move through our study of the book of Acts we are going to begin to read about the missionary journeys of Paul and his compatriots. Lots of city and region names are going to be thrown around in travelogue form, and if we don’t have a lay of the land it can be confusing to know where they are, especially when, like Vancouver and Kailua, there are cities with the same names in different regions. One that will be showing up frequently is Antioch.

I tend to be a pretty visual person, so for me, maps are very helpful. Yes, even as a man I am able to admit that a map is helpful. Just don't tell Cathy that I admitted that.

To try and help us out a little bit, let me quickly walk us through Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey as recorded in Acts 13 - 14.

### **Slide - Paul's 1st Journey Start**

Here is a map of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Middle East and Asia Minor where Paul's journeys were through. If we were to look at the map today

### **Slide - Modern Mediterranean Map**

We would see that the area today is modern day Turkey and Syria.

In Acts 13:1 we are told that Barnabas and Saul are commissioned and sent off from Antioch

### **Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey Antioch**

This is the starting point of the missionary journey, the church in Antioch of Cilicia, and it was here we read in Acts 11, that believers were first called Christians. Outside of Jerusalem, this is really the Mother church of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century church.

Now, were going to go through this quickly. In these two chapters of Acts, 13 & 14, we see Saul, now called Paul, and Barnabas, as a result of both calling and persecution, make one giant loop that will take them through Antioch of Pisidia and back to Antioch of Cilicia.

From the church in Antioch of Cilicia Paul and Barnabas head

### **Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 1 - to Seleucia**

### **Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 2 - to Salamis on the island of Cyprus**

### **Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 3 - to Paphos on the island of Cyprus**

### **Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 4 - from Paphos to Perga in the region of Pamphylia**

### **Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 4a - Antioch in Pisidia**

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 4b - Yup, that's Antioch number two**

And it was there in Antioch that Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue and laid out the entire story of God's redemptive work from Israel's slavery in Egypt, through the promised land, to God giving them judges, to their asking for a king, God giving them Saul and then David, a man after God's own heart, to John the Baptist, to Jerusalem's rejection of Jesus, His crucifixion, burial and resurrection, to now, Paul and Barnabas, his witnesses who bring good news first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

If you are ever looking for a summary of the Bible and God's redemptive work, just read chapter 13 of Acts. Paul lays it all out.

The Good news was well received by many, but Luke tells us that the Jews rose up and incited persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of the region.

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 5 - So P&B headed to Iconium**

It is here that we find ourselves in Chap 14 with vs 1 telling us

**Slide - The same thing occurred in Iconium, where Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. Acts 14:1-2**

Let's finish the travelogue quickly and then we will focus in on our passage for today. Because persecution again arose we read that P& B head out again

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 6 - First to Lystra**

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 7- Then to Derbe**

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 8 - Back to Lystra**

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 9 - Back to Iconium**

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 10 - Back to Antioch of Pisidia**

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 11**- From there to Perga & Attalia

**Slide - Pauls 1<sup>st</sup> Journey 13** - Finally back to Antioch of Cilicia, their sending Church

Upon their return, Luke tells us that they gathered the church together

**Slide - 27 When they arrived, they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles. Acts 14:27**

Yep, you're right, it was the first missionary slide show in history.

Can you imagine someone who would make the whole church listen to his travel stories?

But seriously, what an exciting time for the early church to hear the stories of the Gospel going out to a new mission frontier, to hear the response among the Gentile world. In the midst of the slide show, Paul tells them of what happened Lystra.

Up until that point things were going pretty much as expected. Opportunities to share the Gospel, people responding wanting to hear more. The Jews reacting and stirring up the crowds. Eventually getting run out of town and moving on to the next opportunity. This is something that will seem to become a way of life for Paul.

As they are gathered together and hearing the recounting Paul says, "But folks, when we got to Lystra, you won't believe what happened" And then Paul recounts the story, as read to us today, of the healing of the cripple, his response of faith, and the crowd going crazy saying that Paul and Barnabas were the gods come down from heaven, Zeus and Hermes. Gods!"

**Slide - Jupiter and Hermes (combine them on one slide)**

History tells us that in the Greek culture, it was not unusual for different regions to worship their chosen deities, and consider them patrons of the area. Archeology has told us that there was worship of Zeus and Hermes, (Jupiter and Mercury in the Latin) in the area of Lystra.

As the people witness and hear supernatural events in their midst, their first response is that the gods have come down into their midst. The priests of the temple start bring garland and bulls to sacrifice to them to worship them as gods.

Paul and Barnabas did as any of us would, they pulled a Hulk Hogan.

**Slide - Hulk Hogan**

Okay, it probably wasn't like that, but still very dramatic. The last thing Paul and Barnabas wanted to do was to draw attention away from Christ and place it on themselves. They wanted it to clear that God had come to earth, but in the person of Jesus Christ and they were just the witnesses of the redemptive work God had done in Christ.

I know that a response like this seems far fetched, but don't we have it every day in our world?

**Slide - paparazzi**

We are so quick today to create our own idols and to worship people, artists, athletes, as if they were gods. And sadly, we can be guilty of doing the same thing within the church.

Paul and Barnabas weren't going to fall into the "rock star" trap. They responded immediately by letting the people know they were just people themselves, in need of the same grace and love from Christ, that they were proclaiming to the people. The message was Jesus, not Paul and Barnabas.

And it's a good thing Paul and Barnabas didn't try and make a home for themselves up on the pedestal, because as quickly as the people wanted to worship them, just as quickly the Jews stirred up the crowds and they stoned Paul and dragged them out of the city.

Paul and Barnabas went from what the world would classify as the highest of highs, being worshiped as a god, to the lowest of lows, being stoned and run out of town, nearly being left for dead.

What is Paul's take away from these experiences and what can we learn for the faithful living out of God's call upon our lives? Paul doesn't expound here, but I think we can discover many of the spiritual truths Paul has learned as we look to his writings to the churches he has ministered to.

Let's look at three of them.

**Slide - 1. Our job is to be an aroma of Christ**

Paul has understood that his calling is to proclaim Christ and to leave the results up to God. It says in II Cor 2:14-16

**Slide - 14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. II Cor 2:14-16**

Paul says that our life in Christ, when shared with others is an aroma. The sense of smell is considered by many as the strongest of the senses. We can have strong reactions of an aroma that just come out of the blue.

The scientific reason for this is that the olfactory bulb, the part of the brain that processes smell, interacts with regions of the brain that are responsible for storing emotional memories. Through the process of conditioned learning, a smell becomes associated with the particular experience, person, or time period with which it is repeatedly paired. In some cases, we may not be aware of a specific memory, we just have a positive or negative association with a smell and don't know why.

In each of the cities Paul and Barnabas visited they preached the same message, Christ crucified and risen. For some people, whose hearts responded to the message, it was a message from life to life. For those who rejected the message it is a message from death to death. It was the same words to both, what made the difference was their heart response, or lack there of.

As you live out your life in Christ and allow his love to pour out of you, some people are going to be very drawn to Christ and others are going to react against Him. Much of this response

might be focused on us. Our job is not to take credit for it or to be discouraged by it. Our job is to be God's sweet presence in the world.

That leads us to the second truth

- Slide - 1.      Our job is to be an aroma of Christ**
- 2.      Our goal is only to work only for God's approval**

**Slide - "Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ." Gal 1:10**

The apostle Paul learned early on that if his life was based on the approval of man, his life would be a roller coaster that no one could survive. Paul's first missionary journey goes from rebuking evil and people converting, to being driven out of the region, to being proclaimed a god, to being stoned and left for dead. Clearly, Paul didn't change his message to please people or base his self-esteem on what people thought of him. His goal was to serve Christ and Christ only. Paul had seen the results of Jesus staying fixed on the Father's call upon his life rather than being swayed to be someone different by the world around him. It was an obedience to the call.

If our goal is to always please people we will end up having to compromise the message of Christ, and that becomes a no win situation.

Our last truth for today

- Slide - 1.      Our job is to be an aroma of Christ**
- 2.      Our goal is only to work for God's approval**
- 3.      Everything we do should be done unto Christ**

Who do you do what you do for? In other words, who is your audience for what you do? As we

just looked at, do you do things for the approval of others or do you do things to honor Christ.

**Slide - “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Col 3:17**

Paul lays it out for us. Everything we do, our work, our relationships, our ministry, our play, our performances, our school work, our art, all that we are and do, should be done unto Christ. Rather than playing to the crowds, seeking to please, Paul says we should live our lives as if we only have an audience of one.

How awesome it is to know the God who sees all is the one who takes great joy in His children. How great to it will be to hear the words of the Father, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Everyone of us has been called to the mission field. It is our work place, our schools, our families, our neighborhoods. Some are called to the Philippines and some are called next door. Whatever the location let the sweet aroma of Christ be experienced by all.

How about one last truth to truth.

- Slide - 1. Our job is to be an aroma of Christ**
- 2. Our goal is only to work for God’s approval**
  - 3. Everything we do should be done unto Christ**
  - 4. Tell all the world what God has done.**

Paul and Barnabas wrapped everything up by gathering the church and sharing all that God had done. We need to do the same. Celebrate what God does in your life. Let the whole world know the amazing things God does in your life.

Get out there and do it!