

Sermon on **Acts 13:46-49** for Epiphany 2025  
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

*“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.” When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.”*

**Epiphany: The Gift of God is for All People.**

**1) God's Word is that All means All but only through Christ.**

**2) Rejoice in it. Honor it. Carry it to all.**

Do you like the new hymnal yet? Which is the best one, The Lutheran Hymnal 1941, Christian Worship 1993, or Christian Worship 2021? Or do you like the one that's on the screen, whichever one that is. You see, we change. Sometimes gradually. Sometimes suddenly. Some things, it doesn't really matter, though it might be important. Some things we ought not change whether we think it important or not – like the Bible's teachings. We must not do that. But the color of the carpet in church, whether we sing 4 verses or 5 verses of a hymn, or even our service times, these things can change.

Was Paul's message @ Antioch in Pisidia a necessary change, or something that ought not be changed? The Jews decided that all these Gentiles coming into the family of God by grace through faith in Christ without circumcision, OT dietary laws, the observance of festivals, etc., seemed too much. Shouldn't they have to earn it? Shouldn't they have to play by our rules? Paul and Barnabas were willing to suffer, but when the Word of God and the way of salvation was at stake, it was time to speak boldly. You are only saved, not by custom or observance of some festival, but by Christ Jesus and him alone. The Old Testament rules and regulations were meant to point you to Christ and they are fulfilled in him. Now that he is here, do not hold onto them. Hold onto Christ and live for him.

But the Jews that day in Antioch wouldn't. They wanted to hold on to the forms and the rules and the regulations and customs and they rejected Christ and God's Word. Paul and Barnabas spoke *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.”* This was incredibly sad. The Jews were the ones who carried the promise, kept the Word, passing it down with utmost care generation to generation so that the Words of Scripture would not be lost or adulterated, but kept and read and lived. But they missed the message, or really let the Savior pass them by. And in so doing, they rejected the Scriptures. They rejected the one Scripture points to – Jesus, the Savior of all. **God's Word is that All means All, but only through Christ.** And they didn't want Him, and so they lost it all.

But Jesus wanted them. Do you want them? Do you want all? Do you want the person that is different from you? Do you want the person that is of a different culture, nationality, is hard to understand on the phone or in person, the person that takes a lot of time and accommodations, the person that is old, young, loud, quiet, needy, do you get what I am getting at? Jesus wants all of them. Do we? Do we set up divisions in our own minds or qualifications of who should be welcome here or welcome to stay and hear, and grow together, and listen, or welcome to talk to me? While we would say, “No! We want everyone!” and sometimes we do so well with this, but at other times does the way we act, the standards we judge by, reflect God's Word and Jesus' love for the lost? Or is it more our comfort zone or preference?

There was a time when many of our churches didn't want to change from German to English. There was even the thought that deep theological concepts couldn't be explained in the English language. Although with words like rizz, and lit, fire, slay, sigma taking on new meanings maybe they were on to something. But really, sometimes certain changes or resistance to change can reveal hidden judgmentalism, bigotry, and pride in our sinful hearts. We know they are there. Do we view everyone in our life as someone Jesus loved enough to die for and save, and someone just as worthy as we are (or really unworthy) to be in God's family? Jesus wanted them. Jesus counted both Jew and Gentile alike bought and paid for, but the Jews in Antioch did not want Jesus and so judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. How scary. How tragic.

Yet in this tragedy, the sunshine of God's great plan of salvation, God's Word shines through. *“I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”* Just because the Jews were closing their eyes to such a great sunshine of salvation, the sun still shone, and it shined on the Gentiles. That day in Antioch, God opened their eyes showing Jesus came to save

all, even people who were lost and once outside his family, even them. God appointed them to believe. We are all saved the same way, by God's grace through faith. And this faith is a gift of God to hold onto and believe these promises. Some reject and put themselves outside of Christ and his counting them worthy. This is not God's fault or predetermination. By their rejection they judge themselves unworthy. Jesus came to save all, Jew and Gentile alike, and he meant it.

You saw glimpses of the Word being for **all** through Jesus' life as he was honored by Magi from the East – people not in Jerusalem or Judea. Jesus chose disciples of differing stripes, most from Galilee, to follow him for three years and take his Word to the world. Jesus took time for a Samaritan woman and saved a town. Jesus healed a Syrophenician woman's daughter and praised her faith. Jesus suffered and died on a cross for the divisions, bigotries, the pride of all of us, and rose that all might be forgiven and live now and eternally. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* **Epiphany: The Gift of God is for All People. 1) God's Word is that All means All, but only through Christ.** So what do we do? **2) Rejoice in it. Honor it. Carry it to all.**

*"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region."* God opened their eyes to see and they could finally see. They rejoiced. Every few months someone lets me know they are seeing more clearly than ever before. Whether it's cataract surgery, lasik, or some other modern marvel, their eyesight improves sometimes so that glasses are not even needed. But to go from blindness to sight, can you imagine? It's like the videos you sometimes see that show a child or an adult who was deaf hearing for the first time through a cochlear implant. And they hear the voice of a loved one which they have never heard before, or at least so clearly. Everyone ends up crying because it is so amazing. Even more amazingly **Rejoice in this**, that the Gospel is for all through Christ.

**Rejoice in it.** Paul and Barnabas had preached in the synagogue and were invited back. When they showed up the next week to speak the Word of the Lord more, you hear that *"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord."* How do you think that happened? The light was turned on for these Gentiles and they did not want to shut their eyes ever again. And they wanted others to see the light as well. This is a message that brings from death to life, from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight, from life full of uncertainty and doubt, to life with certainty, purpose and joy. Christ brings life. Christ brings peace between you and God. Christ brings unity not based on likeness, or culture, or color, political party, or language, but based on his Word, his love, him. He brings us into his family, this island of misfit toys into one body that is alive and with joy and purpose, and he does great things through this body. Rejoice in Jesus and all he means for you – forgiveness, life with purpose to serve according to his guidance and good commands, and eternal life waiting which helps us in the trials and the difficulties. Rejoice that it is for all, which means it is for you.

**Honor it.** Dig into this Word. Come back to hear it. Bring a friend that God's Word might work in their heart. What a wonderful blessing to think all New Ulm would show up to hear about a Savior from sin, a God who loves us, and what a life lived for him looks like – what it means to love God and honor him, what it means to love your neighbor whether that neighbor is your spouse, your co-worker, your child, your parent, the stranger who is totally the opposite of you, even an enemy, but someone Jesus loves still the same, and to know where it all leads – on the path he has given us to walk – to heaven.

**Carry it to all.** *The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.* Paul and Barnabas later got kicked out of that region. The Jews who opposed them stirred up enough trouble. But that didn't mean what they brought those people was not true. Those believers carried the Word and the news spread throughout the region. And Paul and Barnabas moved on to the next town to share the message. **Carry it.** Some will reject, sure, the sun will shine and they'll keep their eyes closed and stumble in the darkness, but you, bring the Word that opens minds, opens hearts, and brings people from death to life, blindness to sight. Invite a friend to church to check it out – *"Come and see."* Invite a friend to a Bible Class, a service, or function here or at school. Tell them what you like about it all, what you receive here. Let them hear what it feels like when the sun shines on your face. Why? Because Epiphany means that God loves you and he loves them too. **The Gift of God is for all people. 1) God's Word is that All means All, but only through Christ. 2) Rejoice in it. Honor it. Carry it** that all might have the same joy, same life now and eternally that you have. Amen.