Easter 6 Acts 11:19-26
May 9, 2021 141-492-371-491

See God's Grace…
I. As the Church reaches out with God's Word.
II. As people grow in God's Word.

Dear Christian friends,

Are you an OPTIMIST or **pessimist**? The standard test to **figure** that out is a **half-filled glass** of water. The pessimist sees the glass as half-EMPTY and worries about **running out** of water. The optimist sees the glass as half-FULL and is glad. **Half** a glass of water is BETTER THAN no water at all.

I don't like the STRICT **optimist/pessimist** definition. We can't deny that there are problems that need to **be dealt** with. At the **same time** we should never be so overwhelmed by our problems that we DON'T SEE all the good things **God is doing**.

Between the **optimist** and pessimist is the REALIST. I like the term OPTIMISTIC REALIST. Barnabas is **an example** of that. ***"When he arrived*** (in Antioch) ***and SAW GOD'S GRACE, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord."*** Let's make sure that **we also** SEE GOD'S GRACE. See God's grace 1)**as** the Church reaches out with God's Word and 2)**as** people grow in God's Word.

I. As the Church reaches out with God's Word.

SEE GOD'S GRACE! **Some** might argue what grace?! **These Christians** were fleeing persecution in Jerusalem. They had LOST their homes and **jobs** - they had moved to FOREIGN COUNTRIES and strange places – **all because** of their faith in Jesus.

Put yourself in their shoes. You've moved to **Antioch** – the third largest city in the Roman empire – about **500,000** people. It was the perfect place to GET LOST in the crowd. You could LAY LOW – BLEND IN – and not be noticed. You get a NEW JOB – find a new **house**. You're still a Christian but now you KEEP QUIET about it. You've LEARNED YOUR LESSON.

THANK GOD - we haven't lost our **homes** or **jobs** because we're Christians. We faithfully come to **God's house** each week. But then during the week do we JUST BLEND IN with everybody else? Do we keep quiet about our **Christian faith** and **values**? Why CAUSE TROUBLE, right? **What** will people think if we START PUSHING religion?

Take another look at **what happened** in Antioch. These Christians stayed faithful to their Lord. They were WILLING TO GIVE UP their **homes** and **jobs** but not their Savior and hope of heaven. **Let's face it**, people will give up their faith for LESS REASONS than that! **If** they have TOUGH TIMES then it's what good is God? If it's GOOD TIMES then it's what do I need God for? And in today's POLITICALLY CORRECT society it's just a lot easier to **go along** with the sin than STAND UP for what **God says**.

But not these Christians! SEE GOD'S GRACE at work! They were NO DIFFERENT than us. It HURT to leave their **homes** and give up their **jobs**. It was **probably** SCARY moving to a **strange city** and country. But they treasured their Savior and His Word. MORE IMPORTANT than their homes, **jobs**, **toys** – more important than their PERSONAL COMFORT and CONVENIENCE – was Jesus' forgiveness and promise of heaven. They could DO WITHOUT many things but they just COULDN'T LIVE **without Jesus**. God's grace worked that faith in their hearts.

SEE MORE of God's grace! Not only did these Christians KEEP their faith they also shared it with their **new neighbors** and friends. AT FIRST they spoke only to **fellow Jews**. That was a NATURAL STARTING POINT. Paul did that on his **missionary journeys**. The Jews had a BASIC KNOWLEDGE

of the OT. They knew God's law and His promise of a Savior. It was a good place to START SHARING ***"the good news about the Lord Jesus."*** But they DIDN'T STOP there. Some ***"also began to speak to the Greeks."*** They didn't just WRITE PEOPLE OFF. "They have their OWN RELIGION already. They'll never believe." These Christians shared God's Word and LEFT THE RESULTS up to God.

SEE GOD'S GRACE at work! These Christians were filled with **God's love** and they just had to share that love with others. They were convinced of **their own** TOTAL SINFULNESS and INABILITY to save themselves. They knew their ONLY HOPE of forgiveness – of peace with God and **eternal life** in heaven – was Jesus. ONLY Jesus' blood shed on the cross could ***"cleanse them from all sin."*** **Only** Jesus' sinless life enabled them to STAND ACCEPTABLE before God. **Only** Jesus' resurrection from the dead gave them SURE HOPE in the face of death. They understood that ABOUT THEMSELVES. They understood that was ALSO TRUE about **everybody else**. ONLY those who believe in Jesus **have forgiveness** and **eternal life**. ALL OTHERS are heading to hell forever. The ONLY WAY people can believe in Jesus is if they FIRST HEAR about Jesus. These Christians knew THEY WERE THE ONES to **do the telling**.

SEE GOD'S GRACE **at work**! ***"The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord."*** That's what mission work is ALL ABOUT – people turning to the God and believing in Jesus as their Savior. Reaching out with **God's Word** IS WORK – and IT WORKS! Many **new missions** GET STARTED as Christians move or get transferred to new cities and start sharing their Savior. New mission fields **open up** as refugees flee to one country – hear the gospel and then take the gospel back to their own country. As foreign students come **to study** in our country many hear the gospel – believe the gospel – and then take the gospel BACK with them to their **homelands**. AS IN ANTIOCH ***"the Lord's hand was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord."***

It's all PURE GRACE – God's undeserved love for sinners. God not giving up on **us**. God REACHING OUT with His Word to deliver people from Satan and hell. God REACHING OUT in Jesus with forgiveness, life and hope. What a PRIVILEGE to be part of that work!

REJOICE in what God's grace is doing! Be OPTIMISTIC as you reach out to **family** and **friends** with God's Word. Be OPTIMISTIC as you bring generous offerings to **help spread** God's Word. But please understand that's only HALF THE BATTLE. We have to BE REALISTIC. There's also the need to NURTURE and **strengthen** faith. **Here too** SEE GOD'S GRACE…

II. As people grow in God's Word.

Barnabas was an OPTIMISTIC REALIST. ***"When (Barnabas) saw God's grace, he was glad and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts."*** Encouragement and growth in our **Christian faith** are DAILY NECESSITIES. The devil is ***"prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*** The world **with its charms** has led many to ***"shipwreck"*** their faith. Our sinful natures are our OWN WORST ENEMIES. Some famous last words are "I'd NEVER DO that!" We're in confirmation season again. **Young Christians** are promising to "REMAIN TRUE TO GOD" - to "SUFFER EVEN DEATH, rather than fall away from their Savior." Yet many do fall away. Jesus warned about that in the **parable** of the sower and the seed. Some ***"receive the message with joy, but since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution come because of the Word, he quickly falls away."*** For others ***"the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke"*** out their faith. People get TOO BUSY for church. They DON'T HAVE TIME to read their Bibles. We all probably know people this has happened too. MORE IMPORTANTLY, have we talked to them?

Barnabas the OPTIMISTIC REALIST ***"encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts."*** We read in Hebrews 10, ***"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. Let us***

consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." FAITHFULLY coming to church has SEVERAL PURPOSES. It's a time for us to GROW IN OUR FAITH **through** God's Word and sacraments and to seek God's blessings in prayer. It's also a time for us to BE WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS – to encourage each other in our Christian faith and lives. The person who thinks he DOESN'T NEED that strengthening and **encouraging** is ONLY FOOLING himself. He is setting himself up to FALL FROM FAITH.

"For a whole year (Barnabas and Paul) ***met with the church and taught a large number of people."*** That's THE KEY to remaining true to the Lord. **Each one** of us needs to be IN GOD'S WORD. Let's DROP THE EXCUSE that the Bible is too hard **to understand**. Let's **drop the excuse** that we know enough of the Bible. We don't. Let's **drop the excuse** that we don't have time to **read** our Bibles or **come** to Bible class. If something is important to us we MAKE TIME for it. What can be more important than GROWING CLOSER to our Savior? God gave us His Word to ***"make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"*** – so that ***"through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."***

SEE GOD'S GRACE as people grow in God's Word. See people GROW MORE SURE of God's **forgiveness** and more confident of **heaven**. See people find peace in their TROUBLED LIVES as God's peace **fills** their hearts. This is **one** of the SPECIAL JOYS of being a pastor or teacher. We **not only** get to work with God's Word – God often lets us see His WORD AT WORK. **To see** the eyes of the dying OPEN WIDE as they hear again God's promise of eternal life in heaven through Jesus. **To see** the relief of a guilty conscience as it is ASSURED of God's **full forgiveness at** Jesus' cross. **To see** marriages and families rebuilt on God's **forgiving, faithful love** in Jesus. **To see** the discouraged comforted by Jesus' PRESENCE and PROMISES – **to see** people GROW in their understanding – living - and sharing of God's Word. Just SEE GOD'S GRACE at work!

We as **individuals** – as a **congregation** and a **synod** – have so much TO REJOICE in. God has been so good and GRACIOUS to us. Yes, there are problems. I like to call them OPPORTUNITIES. **Opportunities** to grow in and apply God's Word to our lives. But there's NO NEED to be discouraged. Just look around you and SEE GOD'S GRACE at work! Amen.

NICENE CREED