

May 9, 2010
Easter 6
Mother's Day

"The Risen Lord Reaches Out to the Lost through Us"

ACTS 14:8-18

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. ¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

Last Sunday afternoon my wife and I enjoyed a walk on the Bob Jones trail near Avila Beach. As we crossed the road to the beach area, a car stopped and asked if the road that goes to Avila is Highway 1. No, we told the lady in the passenger seat, you need to go back to the 101 Freeway and then go north and pick up Highway 1 in San Luis Obispo. There is a good feeling, a feeling of satisfaction that comes with helping people who are lost.

Today we see the Apostle Paul reaching out to people who were eternally lost. These people lived in an ancient Greek city called Lystra. They believed in false gods with names such as Zeus and Hermes. Paul was not afraid to tell them the truth about the true God who created heaven and earth. He was not ashamed to talk to them about Jesus as the one who could save them from the judgment that was to come.

As we look this morning at how the risen Lord used the Apostle Paul to reach out to people who were lost, we want to see more clearly that the Lord leaves us here on this earth at this time and place so that we might be used by him to seek and save the lost.

He brings the people to us

The risen Lord Jesus has a way of taking us where we are and then using our lives to intersect with people who are lost. He did that for Paul and his missionary companion Barnabas. "In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and

had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking.” Can’t you see Paul and Barnabas talking to people in the town square where they came to buy their groceries at what we would call a farmer’s market? Among the people who listened to Paul was this man who had been lame from his birth. See him sitting with his shriveled legs that have never walked. He listens to what Paul is saying about the true God who made the heavens and earth. He listens to Paul talking about people being hopelessly lost in sin without Jesus God’s Son as their Savior who came to earth to rescue them. Paul did not have the power to look into this man’s heart, but from the visible expression on his face Paul could see this man believed what was said about Jesus.

What happened next is truly amazing. Paul sees the faith in this man’s life and says to him, “Stand on your feet.” How cruel it would be for us to say to someone sitting in a wheel chair, “Jump up and walk.” How cruel to tell a blind person, “Just open your eyes and see.” How cruel to tell someone hard of hearing to open their ears and listen up. When Paul says, “Stand on your feet!” he is speaking for Jesus. Jesus’ words spoken through Paul have tremendous power. It says that the man jumped up and began to walk. His shriveled legs immediately become strong and limber. He does not have to learn how to walk and keep his balance because God has healed his legs and given him the power to walk. The Lord will bring people to us who are lost just as he brought this lame man into the live of Paul.

What happened next brings even more people to Paul and Barnabas. “When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycanonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form.” Perhaps because Barnabas was tall and handsome they named him Zeus, the leader of the gods. Because Paul did most of the speaking they named him Hermes who was the Greek god noted for delivering speeches and messages. Even the local priest for the great god Zeus brings out bulls and wreaths to have a sacrifice and a feast for these gods who have come down to them in human form. The Greeks loved their myths about gods coming to people in human form.

The risen Lord Jesus has a variety of ways to provide us with opportunities to bear witness to him and his resurrection. Oh, I am sure if the Lord allowed us to perform miracles such as healing people who could not walk, large crowds of people would soon come bringing with them their lame, their blind, their deaf, and those sick with cancer and other problems. As the word gets out into our community thousands would come to see miracles of healing just as they did in Lystra.

Think of what the risen Lord did on the great day of Pentecost. There was the strange sound of a mighty rushing wind, no wind, but only the sound of the wind. The people gathered together towards that sound and they saw flames of fire on the heads of the apostles, and heard them speak in their own languages about the wonders of God. Peter was privileged to see thousands of lost people come across the path of his life and be saved from the wrath to come.

How is the Lord going to bring people to us to hear the truth about God, if he does not give us the signs and wonders of the early apostles? The answer lies in how you live your life each day. Let me give you an example of this from the words that come out of your mouth. People know you by the way you talk. If you do not use your tongue to curse and swear and tell dirty stories, they will take note of you as being different. Or if your words

reflect your joy in the Lord, people will take notice. Philippians 2 says, "Do everything without grumbling and complaining" as you shine like stars in a crooked and depraved generation. Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The peace you have in Christ your Savior will show itself in the way you handle problems and troubles in life. Others will take note of you and give you opportunities to talk about this peace that this world cannot give. When you get into your car and drive to worship on Sunday, the people in your neighborhood will recognize you as someone who goes to worship. Opportunities will arise to reflect your joy in worship in how you live whether it is hitting a golf ball or talking to your neighbor. Others will take note of you when the love that Christ has for you begins to bring forth fruit in your life. 1 Peter 2 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

I want to illustrate the point we are making by showing you a set of head phones or actually ear buds. Have you ever seen someone wearing ear buds and their whole body is moving and swaying, almost as if they are dancing? It is obviously they are listening to music, even if you cannot hear the music. People may not hear and know what you have seen and heard in God's Word, but they sure can see your body language as you live your life for Christ. This will attract people to you and lead them to be curious about what you believe, just as the miracle of healing attracted a large crowd to Paul. This is God's plan for his church in these last days. The Lord will bring lost people across the paths of our lives. He will also help us speak the truth of his Word to them as Paul did for the people of Lystra.

He enables us to speak the truth to them

Paul is not ashamed to tell these people about the true God. When the apostles heard these people proclaim them as gods, they tore their clothes to show how upset they were, a sign of great emotional grief and agony. Then they talked about the true God who provides for us and takes care of us, "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn to these worthless things to the living God who made heaven and earth and everything in it." They speak of the God who created all things. Begin your witness to Jesus by talking about God's creation. Look at the flowers. Look at the fields. Look at the birds of the air. Look at the beauty of the ocean and the mountains.

It is part of our sinful nature to want God on our terms. These Greeks at the time of Paul were intelligent people but they worshipped multiple gods with names such as Zeus and Hermes. Today if you visit Athens you can walk in places where the great philosophers Aristotle and Plato once challenged people with questions. You can also visit the remains of the Parthenon, a temple to the multiple gods of ancient Greece. Did you know that the days of the week are named after the gods of the Germanic and Scandinavian people? Tuesday is named after the god Tiu and Thursday from the god Thor and Wednesday from the war God Woden? In the prophet Isaiah we hear the Lord tell how people made gods of wood and stone and then they nailed them to the floor to make sure they don't fall over. Romans 1 says this about people: "Although they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."

The risen Lord also gives us the privilege to talk to people about a God who provides us with our daily needs of life as Paul did. He told these people in Lystra how the Lord

had left a powerful witness of his love for us by providing rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. "He has provided you with plenty of food and fills your life with joy." It is privilege to use the mouths the Lord has given us to remind people who are going through hard times that the Lord still provides for people and cares about them. Jesus told the people to look at the birds of the air and observe how our heavenly Father takes care of them. "Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?"

The Lord our God will take care of people and provide for them as long as this world stands, but then the end will come. All people will have to stand before God in the final judgment and answer to God for the lives they have lived. We know and believe that is true. We also believe that our best efforts to make ourselves worthy always fall short of God's glory. In his love and mercy the Lord has allowed us to see in Jesus everything we need to be accepted on the last day. In Philippians Paul writes, "That I might be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, but that which comes through faith in Christ Jesus." Someone needs to give these people who are lost the right directions back to God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." Today we have seen how the Lord provided Paul and Barnabas with opportunities to help the lost. The Lord has already planned how he will give you and me the opportunities to help the lost this coming week. Amen.