



Weekly Update

May 2-8

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Acts 15:1-18 The early church convenes The Jerusalem Council

The early church faced another problem. The first conflict came between the Aramaic-speaking Jews and the Greek-speaking Jews. This conflict occurred early in the book of Acts, and was mostly over how the followers of The Way in Jerusalem would care for each other. The Aramaic-speakers were long-term residents of Jerusalem. This was the native language of most people in Judea. The Greek-speakers were mostly from the rest of the Roman Empire, and were new immigrants into the city. The division was over language, but it was also over culture, heritage, and how to equitably distribute goods to those in need within the community. It was a crisis over how to define and live out as a diverse community of believers. The solution was to appoint seven “deacons” who would oversee the equitable distribution of food to all the followers.

The second major conflict had its origins in Antioch, a city in modern Syria, which was about 300 miles north of Jerusalem (about a 20-day journey). It is in Antioch that followers of The Way were first called “Christians.” These first Christians were struggling with a new problem—how to be a community of both Jews and Gentiles. In this dispute over diversity, there was even more at stake than language and culture. This time, the debate was over religious practices, dietary practices, the entire Law of Moses, and the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision.

Once again, the early community of believers were struggling with how to define themselves. What did it mean to live as a Christian in a world of Jewish AND Gentile culture. For centuries Jewish people had been set apart by the Law. Their traditions and customs bred distrust among Gentiles, but it also helped keep them secure as a distinct people. The first followers of Christ were all Jewish and knew no other way to live than to follow the Torah.

Now Jews AND Gentiles were starting to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and they were trying to form a new beloved community that was united in Christ. There were real questions about how this would work. Paul and Barnabas argued that Gentile believers of Christ did not have to submit to the Law and circumcision. Some of the traditionalists in Jerusalem thought that Gentiles must first

become fully Jewish—including circumcision—to then come into the family of believers of Christ.

Both sides appealed to Scripture. The traditionalists pointed to the Torah, to the promises made to Abraham, and to the Law of Moses that described the way to live as a distinct people of God.

The other side also appealed to Scripture, but instead to the Prophets that proclaimed that even Gentiles would come to worship God, and to the Psalms which said much the same.

Like many of the Church’s debates today over inclusion, both sides point to Scripture. Traditionalists can point to some of the same Levitical code and to some of Paul’s own letters. Those on the side of inclusion though point to other parts of Paul’s letters, to the Gospel stories of inclusion, and to the fundamental truth that God is love.

Paul and Barnabas won the day though, by pointing not only to Scripture, but to their Experience of the Holy Spirit. They shared stories of how the Holy Spirit had already entered the Gentiles. Their evidence was signs and wonders that Gentiles were doing without circumcision or the Law. In the end, they argued that the Holy Spirit had already made the decision to include Gentiles, and who were they to get in the way of what the Spirit was doing?

As our Church continues to debate issues of inclusion and how to define ourselves as a community, may we continue to point to the evidence of the Holy Spirit. In the end, who are we to get in the way of what the Spirit is already doing?



The Jerusalem Council (Creative Commons) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/frted/4587910868>

TWO RIVERS CHURCH WEEKLY UPDATE

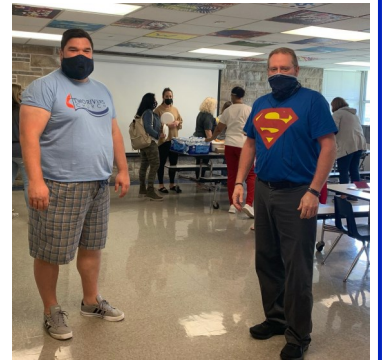
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Two Rivers thanks Rock Island Academy staff

Tuesday, May 4 was National Teachers' Day. To thank the teachers and staff of Rock Island Academy, Pastor Robb presented them with a lunch and thank you cards on behalf of the people of Two Rivers Church. The Evangelism Team approved the purchase of two six-foot party subs from Hungry Hobo, along with chips and cookies.

Along with the lunch, there were several hand-written thank you notes that members of Two Rivers wrote on Sunday. Pastor Robb had the chance to thank the staff personally and read one of the cards to the staff that was written by a retired Rock Island teacher. The staff was visibly touched by the thoughtful gift and especially loved the cards.

This year Two Rivers has presented the teachers two different boxes of snacks for their lounge, lunch from Pee-Wee's at the start of the year, and 400 cloth and paper masks for the students to help keep them safe.



SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THE WEEK: Acts 15:11

On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Monday	Acts 13:1-12	Paul and Barnabas Commissioned
Tuesday	Acts 14:8-20	Reception of Paul and Barnabas
Wednesday	Acts 15:22-35	The Council's Letter
Thursday	Acts 16:11-15	The Conversion of Lydia
Friday	Acts 17:16-31	Paul in Athens
Saturday	Acts 22:6-21	Paul Sent to the Gentile

CARING CONVERSATIONS or REFLECTIONS

- ◇ **Thinking About This Week's Story:** This week, the first Christians were have disagreements. What is a disagreement (or fight) that you had today? Did it get resolved? How?
- ◇ **Getting Ready For Next Week's Story:** In next week's reading, Paul calls out the apostle Peter for bowing to peer pressure. What peer pressure have you felt today (big or small)? What happened?

PRAYER OF THE WEEK

God of all, we are constantly bombarded with information and ideas, and sometimes it is hard to know what is right or real. Open our eyes, O God, to discern which messages are of you and those that might lead us astray. Amen.



WEEKLY GPS

GROW

PRAY

STUDY