



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

April 30, 2023

“Who am I to stand in the way?”

Recap of Sermon from 4/30/23 by Robb McCoy

Scripture: Acts 13-1-3, 14:8-23

In Ovid’s collected fables of Greek and Roman mythology, there is a story of Baucis and Philemon. They were an old married couple in the region of Tyana (which was close to the city from today’s Bible passage – Lystra). One day two poor strangers came to their humble home, and Baucis and Philemon received them with great hospitality. It turned out that the strangers were actually Zeus and Hermes in disguise, and they had been turned away by the rest of the city. As a result, Baucis and Philemon were spared and given a great reward while the rest of the city was destroyed.

The story would have been well known by the people of Lystra. When Paul and Barnabas come to town and heal a man in the public square, the people believed that they were re-living this tale. Afraid of divine retribution, or possibly hoping for a similar extravagant reward, they come out to offer sacrifices to Hermes and Zeus.

Paul and Barnabas objected to such a thing. They revealed that they were not gods in disguise. Instead, they were but messengers of the good news about The God who created all things and came in flesh to deliver all people. Paul and Barnabas appealed to the people’s understanding of the world, and revealed that God’s story of love, justice, and redemption was available to all. They refused to accept the sacrifices, but the people could not seem to grasp what was happening.

Part of what was happening was a clash of culture. There was a language and culture gap, so Paul and Barnabas tried to communicate in a way that would appeal to the people’s cultural understanding. They adapted their message to the culture, but the main message stayed the main message. The good news remained the good news – that the God who created all things continues to show kindness to all people. Still, there was a gap in understanding. And I don’t think the gap was about mistaking Paul and Barnabas for the Greek gods. The misunderstanding was about how people related to gods and to each other.

The culture was fixated on transactional relationships. They sacrificed in order to appease the gods and garner some divine reward. Pleasing the gods would gain reward. Upsetting the gods would garner punishment. And that is how society worked as well. Relationships were about transactions, and quid pro quo system where one only related to others in ways would gain status, esteem, or wealth.

Paul and Barnabas refused to be a part of this transactional system. When they revealed that they would not be rewarding them in any material way, the people were easily turned. Stirred by old enemies, and probably disappointed by the broken-down transaction, they stoned Paul and Barnabas and dragged them out of the city thinking they were dead.

They stoned them because the concept of the Kingdom of God was dangerous. It clashed with the system of transaction upon which their culture was built. And now the line between “back then,” and “right now,” starts to blur. Our system is built on transactions too. When the transactional relationships start to break down, there is turmoil. When there is turmoil, the powerful and comfortable get fearful. When the powerful get fearful, there is violent oppression.

Paul and Barnabas represented a new way of relating. The good news of Christ that they brought broke down transactional relationships. Kingdom of God love is built on welcome, community, and forgiveness. The Empire was built on exploitation, quid pro quo, and a regimented structure of transactions. The idols we worship now are not Zeus and Hermes. They are nationalism, consumerism, and consumption, all built on the strength of transactional relationships.

When the Kingdom of God begins to take hold, the response, like it was in Lystra, can be violent oppression. Yet something amazing happened. Paul and Barnabas left the city of Lystra, continued to share the Good News, and eventually came back. They came back to Lystra and found that there were disciples. The Good News survived the violent backlash.

The Good News persisted. It was not compromised by Paul and Barnabas adapting to culture. Paul and Barnabas shaped their message so that it could be received by people who lived in a transactional world, and Christ’s message of forgiveness, grace, community, and love survived. Sharing the message of Christ’s love was needed in Lystra, and it is needed today.

We who share Christ’s love with all people are not compromising to culture. We are holding firm to the main message – The God who created all things came in flesh to deliver all people. We, like Paul and Barnabas before us, appeal to our cultural understanding of the world, but refuse to submit to systems of transaction that dehumanize people. Instead, we stand firm in the Holy Spirit and declare that Christ revealed that God’s story of love, justice, and redemption that is available to all.

Next Sunday: Romans 1:1-17, Paul begins his letter