



# Come and See!

May 12, 2019

## The Word...

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia.

On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats.

Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God....

(They) expelled (Paul and Barnabas) from their territory.

So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium.

The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

*(from Acts 13:14, 43-52)*

## Pondering the Word...

Recently, there have been a series of articles in *The Guardian* addressing a study, commissioned by the UK, on the persecution of Christians worldwide. This report, along with those from Open Doors, a non-profit organization that monitors global Christian persecution, indicates a significant increase over the past two years in the risks Christians face, primarily in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

As someone who lives in a nation that espouses religious freedom, and that is populated predominantly by people who at least identify as Christian, the reality of religious persecution seems distant and almost unimaginable (although recently, the US has experienced more of this problem, particularly for those of minority faiths). This kind of thing happened to the early Christians like Paul and Barnabas who were challenging the status quo. How can this still be happening today?

Reports of increased persecution lead those who are threatened (but able) to mount stringent and prejudiced defenses and to counter-attack which leads to nothing but more violence. Or those persecuted are forced to flee their homelands. I have yet to see anyone so threatened "shaking the dust off their feet" or moving forward filled with joy. What lessons does this scripture have for us as we confront persecution today?

## Living the Word...

People like Paul and Barnabas who remain faithful by moving forward without malice don't tend to be long for this world, and the idea of suffering persecution for the sake of the Name is not something many of us desire. How can we keep ourselves motivated to remain faithful, not just to God, but to *the grace of God*? Being faithful to the grace of God means we can stand firm when the going gets tough. That grace encompasses many things: compassion, to be in visible solidarity with those persecuted; courage, to stand up to those who would demonize others because of their faith; patience, when we are questioned or belittled for our beliefs; joy, in knowing that God has an eternal plan for peace and freedom for each one of us.

Pray this week for those who face oppression or persecution that God will grant them relief from their struggles. Pray for those who persecute others, that the God of all will open their eyes and hearts to love and acceptance. And pray also for ourselves, that we will remain faithful to God's grace within us so we can radiate the joy and the light of the Holy Spirit despite the darkness that surrounds us.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

**May 13:** *"I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."* (Jn 10:1-10)

What do you think Jesus is saying here? Some preachers speak of abundant life as being in the form of worldly wealth and comfort, and some live that out very conspicuously. The preceding verses talk about sheep. Sheep don't have complex needs: food, water, and someone to guard and tend to them. They likely don't realize if their shepherd is someone who goes the extra distance to protect them, or is one who is just concerned with how he or she will profit from them. Perhaps the idea of abundant life means we are blessed with the knowledge that our Shepherd is extraordinary, even willing to lay down his life for us, and the abundance we receive from this awareness is the gratitude and awe that someone so great cares for us. Abundant life is not measured in dollars and cents, but in a heartfelt peace that we are so loved.

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**May 14:** *Then they gave lots to them, and the lot fell upon Matthias...* (Acts 1:15-17, 20-26)

The casting of lots to make decisions, particularly with supernatural guidance, is called cleromancy. There are numerous instances in the Old Testament when God instructs someone to cast lots to make a decision. Nowadays, some consider this superstitious or even evil. Yes, we still use "rock, paper, scissors" to decide who goes first, but thinking we can discern God's will by casting die? I don't think so. How *do* we discern God's will? Good discernment involves both the mind and the heart. Discernment is always between two goods (like Matthias and Barsabbas). We pray for the Spirit's light, then use our God-given intelligence to consider the pros and cons, and our imagination to picture the outcome of each option. Then we listen...to movements in our heart, to the advice of trusted confidantes, to God's quiet whispering voice. We might prefer to have the randomness and immediacy of dice to absolve us of responsibility for the way things turn out, but God calls us to call upon his Spirit, to take the time to reflect and to listen. Now *that's* divine guidance!

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**May 15:** *Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me."* (Jn 12:44-50)

The two verses that precede this verse tell us that many elders believed in him, but did not acknowledge him for fear of being expelled from the synagogue — *"they preferred human praise to the glory of God."* I imagine Jesus "crying out," desperate to get his point across, to have people understand what he is trying to tell them. I think about those we talked about on Sunday, rendered silent for fear of harassment or worse. It is not that they who remain silent prefer human praise; they are often trying to preserve their very lives. Jesus came as Light for the world, not to condemn, but to save. Let those of us who are free to practice our faith raise our voices and be unafraid to acknowledge that Light in the name of those who, due to persecution, cannot.

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**May 16:** *"I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart."* (Acts 13:13-25, ref. Ps 89) *"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."* (Jn 13:16-20)

I wonder about what Jesus says here. It seems to me that so much gets lost in the translation between the one sent by God — Jesus — and those of us Jesus sends to carry the message forward. But I find solace in what God has to say about David, a man after God's own heart. The same David who commits adultery and murder; the same one who at times runs away, who lets his ego take hold, but through it all seems to know intimately God's love and mercy, and returns over and over again to experience it. If you, like me, question your worthiness as Christ's voice in the world, look to David, God's flawed but faithful servant.

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**May 17:** *"I myself have set up my king on Zion, my holy mountain."* (Ps 2)

I learned something new today. According to biblical scholar Robert Alter, *"Zion is a modest mountain on the crest of which sits a modest fortified town, the capital of a small kingdom, surrounding by vast empires."* I always thought Zion was the biggest and best, but as per usual, God chooses a quieter, simpler approach. Let's follow God's way today: Where might you be a quiet, humble presence amid the clamor of the world's vast empires?

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**May 18:** *"If you know me, then you will also know my Father."* (Jn 14:7-14)

The operative question Jesus asks is, 'Do you know me?' 'I mean, do you *really* know me? Because if you do, there should be no question about knowing or seeing the Father.' How well do you know Jesus? Have you spent time getting to know him, not just know *of* him? Do you read and try to experience Jesus in the words of Scripture? Have you sought him out where he says we will find him today?