

Sermon – November 12, 2023  
“In your days I am doing a work”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Acts 13:26-41

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill our open hearts, anoint the sharing of these words, and bless your people through them. Use these words to fuel our continuing transformation into Christ's image and lead us out into fruitful labor in Jesus' mission right here, right now. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen*

The Spirit of Jesus in me greets the Spirit of Jesus in you, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Good morning! I would like to thank the veterans among us this morning for your service to our country. Thanks to all who were able to share pictures of the veterans in their lives to help us remember that our freedom as a country has often been defended and kept in place by the sacrifice of our veterans and their families. May their witness speak to our hearts and inspire us to serve as we are led. Much of what I know about the conflicts our nation has been involved in comes from the stories those who served have shared with me over the years. From family, to friends, to coworkers, many have taken time to share some of their stories and

helped me develop a greater understanding of the cost of living free. May all nations live in freedom and peace.

We are in the thirteenth chapter of Acts and find Paul and Barnabus sent by Holy Spirit to Antioch, and on the sabbath they are in a synagogue where Jews and Gentile God-fearers have gathered to worship God. The Shema has been said by those present and they have heard readings from the Torah and the prophets. The leaders of the synagogue have asked Paul and Barnabus to share with them a word of exhortation and Paul has stood up and begun to speak to those gathered. Paul begins to tell those gathered their story as the people of God. He begins with Abraham and works his way quickly through the history of God acting through the people of God. As Paul shares, he makes it clear that in Israel's history, it is God who is acting throughout their story. If we take time to look at who gets the verbs in Paul's speech, we will find it is God who chose the ancestors of the Jews, God who led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, God who nurtured them in the wilderness, and God who gave them the land of Canaan after God drove out seven nations. God gave them kings and gave them David as a king over them, a man after God's heart. (Paul tells those gathered the story of God working in the history of Israel and gives a summary that leads to David as king.) From David as king, Paul leaps forward in Israel's history to a specific descendant of David, Jesus. The God-fearers among the Jews in the synagogue would have been able to follow Paul's story, as they would be familiar with the ancestors and history of God's people, until Paul jumps to Jesus. Now Paul is on new ground for the Jews and God-fearers, and he focuses them on this key descendant of David.

With a focus on Jesus, Paul moves his story to Jerusalem and the actions of the Jews there who did not recognize Jesus as God's Son but put him to death on a tree, in spite of his innocence. Paul tells those listening that the Jews and their leaders fulfilled the words of the prophets that they have heard read in this synagogue. The Jews and Romans placed Jesus' dead body in a tomb. Paul then tells those listening something that changes everything they understand about God acting in the history of Jews and Gentiles. He tells them God raised Jesus from the dead and that many witnesses saw Jesus and are now sharing what they have witnessed with all people. Paul and Barnabus have come to share with those living in Antioch the Good News that God has fulfilled in Jesus, all that the prophets have spoken as promises to the ancestors of the Jews, the Good News that God has raised Jesus from the dead. This verifies that Jesus is God's Son, and through Jesus' death on a tree as a sacrifice in their place, Jesus has

brought forgiveness of sins, forgiveness that the Law that Moses gave them could not bring, and that forgiveness is given to them when they believe in Jesus. What Paul has shared in these few words is the Gospel, the Good News, what we also should be ready to share with others. As we prepare to be witnesses for Jesus, we would be well served to study how Paul shares the Gospel and seek to be ready to emulate his approach as appropriate as we seek to be witnesses for Jesus.

The exhortation that Paul shared is startling news for Jews and Gentiles. Paul has shared that there is now a way, through belief in Jesus, to have deliberate sins taken away and people can be justified or made righteous before God. Such news was not something the Jews taught. It is a new path to God that is not found in the reading of the Law and the prophets, although all of the prophets spoke to the coming of God's Messiah.

The other startling news that Paul has just shared is that Jesus has been raised from the dead and seen by many witnesses. The Jews believed that at the end of time, the end of history when God's plan is made known, there would be a general resurrection. All people would be brought alive and face judgment under the Law. News that Jesus had been raised from the dead, resurrected, and seen by witnesses, means that the resurrection had begun. The end of time has started. With the first born of the resurrection, Jesus, the end of time, the final days, has arrived. Jesus has risen from the dead. His resurrection not only speaks to the beginning of the end of time but it proves that Jesus was who he said he was, the Son of God, the Messiah, the first born from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus means the kingdom of God is at hand; it is breaking in. Time does not continue on in some sort of great cycle as some propose, but the beginning of the end has arrived.

Those God-fearers, the Gentiles, would realize from Paul's words that God is still at work among the people of God and that Paul has just told them that God includes any who believe in Jesus, the firstborn of the dead, and that their sins are taken away. They are, through their belief in Jesus, part of the people of God. Israel's story becomes their story as well. And with Jesus' resurrection, the end of time has begun. They need to be diligent and work urgently to get this Good News to all Gentiles before the completion of the end arrives, time stops, and the general resurrection occurs. The Gentiles would realize that they are now part of God's story and that God has raised someone, Jesus, his Son, from the dead, and by believing in Jesus they are justified, made righteous, through Christ's death and their belief in Jesus. And from Paul's Good News, they would understand that Jesus' resurrection proves that time is coming to an end. The

words that Paul shares bring great, lasting joy to the Gentiles and to Jews who believe in Jesus. The Gentiles are no longer God-fearers, those on the outside allowed to attend synagogue with God's people. They have been made part of Abraham's family. God is still working to bring all people into His kingdom. Just as the Jews were once delivered from cruel slavery in Egypt, Gentiles and Jews, by believing in Jesus, have been delivered from their bondage to slavery to sin and reconciled to God. The Gentiles realize they have Good News to share with everyone they know and meet. Through Jesus, all people, as they believe in Jesus, also are reconciled to God. Gentiles have a story to tell. We also have this story to tell; the end of time has begun. Jesus has risen from the dead; the end of time has begun. Every moment counts. We need to tell everyone this great Good News. We need to tell others the story of Jesus so that they also may be found in the kingdom of God on the last day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. The end of time is closer now than when we were born. We need to have an urgency to tell others the Good News. We need to urgently tell others about how God so loves them that while they were still sinners Jesus died for them and that God raised Jesus up to life so that they also may be forgiven of their sins and justified, made righteous before God in Jesus.

*Pray with me. Jesus, we thank you that you were willing to die that we might be fully justified. We confess that we too often forget that your resurrection is the beginning of the end, and that time is coming to an end. Help us to be your witnesses and urgently share the Good News in this place. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen*

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Go forth into Jesus' mission to all people. Amen