

Anglican Church Noosa
Acts 13:14-43
Alive Again - Resurrection Truth
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This week is the end of our Alive Again series, and today we're looking at Paul's interaction in Antioch.

Every other speech we've looked at in this series has been from Peter. But today we're moving to Paul to finish the series off.

Before we delve into that, let me recap what we've done over these weeks since Easter.

Firstly we looked at Peter beginning to emerge as the leader of this fear-filled bunch of disciples when they needed to replace Judas after the ascension, and he said 'one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.' 1:22

and then we saw his incredible transformation into the fearless leader and what he said in his speech on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.32 - "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it."

Next we looked at Peter's speech to the crowd after healing the lame beggar in chapter 3, and in v.15 he said "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this."

Then we saw Peter and the other apostles before the Sanhedrin after they'd been miraculously released from jail, and in 5:32 Peter said - "We must obey God rather than human beings. God raised Jesus from the dead, whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Last week we saw Peter with Cornelius and he was sharing the great revelation that the gospel is to go to everyone, even the Gentiles! Horror of horrors!!!

And he says in 10:39-41 - "we are witnesses of everything Jesus did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."

And then what happened? — the Holy Spirit came on everyone who heard.

And that day, even Gentiles were baptised.

And in today's passage we move to chapter 13 and vv.30,31, where Paul says ...

'But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.'

What I'm hoping you can see from these verses, each taken from the readings from this series, is that the resurrection of Christ was the impactful thing for these apostles.

The resurrection is what changed them.

They saw Jesus back from the dead.

Yes, they were fearful at the beginning, and yes it took the coming of the Holy Spirit to encourage and embolden them.

But it was not the coming of the Holy Spirit that they were talking about, was it?

It was the resurrection. That's what they were talking about, and how important it was to them that they carried out what Jesus had told them to do - that they would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

They couldn't stop talking about the truth of the resurrection.

They couldn't stop talking about the truth that they had witnessed the resurrection, and therefore, they had to speak about it.

Do you remember what 'witness' means? We looked at this together at the beginning of the month. The greek word is martus. And the same concept comes into our word 'martyr'.

Martus means - one who gives public witness and suffers the consequences.

Nobody does this unless what they are witnessing to is TRUTH.
Resurrection Truth.

Now let's look at what's actually happening in today's passage. Acts 13.

The Apostle Paul had been through his own encounter with Jesus.

A little different than the other apostles, but certainly no less dramatic.

Paul was a tyrant of the first order. He was actively persecuting Christians, and seemingly enjoying it along the way.

The accounts of his behaviour in the early chapters are disturbing to say the least.

But after he watches Stephen being stoned to death, on his way to another tirade of persecution, something incredible happens which changes him.

He meets Jesus on the road to Damascus.

He goes through a process of change and growth, and comes out the other end a convinced follower of Jesus who then has a mission to achieve the complete opposite of what he had been doing.

Instead of hunting down and killing followers of the Way, he actively promoted the Way and wanted more and more people to follow it. This is a turnaround of the first order!

Brothers and sisters if ever you may want to doubt whether someone could become a Christian, please take encouragement from Saul becoming Paul.

There are people that I doubt could ever turn to Christ.

I need to reprimand myself when I think that Robin Bristow could never become a Christian.

I need to repent when I doubt that Vladimir Putin could become a Christian.

Or an 18 yr old shooter.

Or our atheist aunt, or our really lovely neighbour.

And to be brutally honest with myself, I think I doubt it, so that I can be off the hook.

So that I can validate my lack of conversation.

There's no point in talking to them. Can't imagine them becoming a Christian.

But the truth of the resurrection can impact anyone at any time, and that is why we need to be witnesses.

It is why Saul and Barnabas were set apart by the fellowship in Antioch to go on a journey, This was Paul's First Missionary Journey, and here's the route.

He went from Antioch in Syria to the other Antioch in Pisidia. What we now know as Turkey.

They went to the coast, then sailed to Salamis on Cyprus, walked across Cyprus to Paphos, ministering wherever they were.

Then sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, then went on to Pisidian Antioch.

And there's the beautiful story in the synagogue of them being invited to share an exhortation.

This was common practice when visitors came to a synagogue - that they were invited to speak and encourage the regulars.

How would you feel if that happened when you went to a new church?

Are there any visitors here today??

But this of course gave Paul an easy and amazing platform to announce the good news of Jesus Christ.

Which is exactly what he does.

Being a bunch of Jews, he uses their shared and well-known history to explain the significance of this one called Jesus.

And he uses this familiar pattern - Jesus was killed. God raised him from the dead. He was seen. We witnessed it. And we are witnessing to the truth of it now. This is GOOD NEWS - that you need to hear. Don't let it slip you by.

Now it may well be that you hear people say, or you may say it yourself - why do we need to still be doing this in this day and age.

Surely people are beyond hearing stuff like this and we just need to respect wherever they are, and don't impose our beliefs on anybody else.

And surely we shouldn't be sending people to other places these days, to be on mission.

Do we have the right to try to change people?

It's interesting that those questions never arose 2000 yrs ago, even though that society was just as multicultural as ours, and certainly more multi-faith.

Well, I guess the first thing I'd say is that the underlying truth that these first apostles were speaking about has not changed. And people's needs have not changed.

The reason Jesus came is still there. Sinful people needing a sinless Saviour.

And if we have been impacted by that truth, how can we keep it to ourselves.

We know that it is the best news ever, and it is not to be kept to ourselves.

But how on earth do we do it in this context and in this culture?

Well, there are some hints in the passage.

They went to the place where people gathered.

In that context it was the synagogue. And they talked about shared history.

That's not so hard is it?

And at the right time, they talked about God's word and what it meant.

They also demonstrated God's power. Not with just words, but also with actions. We know from previous weeks, that they demonstrated what can be done through the power of the resurrection. The lame man walking as one example.

But also by sharing what God has done in the past. For themselves. Personal testimony goes a long way. And you can connect with peoples' own story. By listening, learning, and engaging.

But we do also need to be realistic.

I want to take you to the next few verses. I think we stopped reading too soon today.

Listen as I read to the end of chapter 13. I'm going to start at v.42.

"As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 43 When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

That's all fantastic news. But listen to what happens next.

45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

" 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

50 But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Now 2000 years later we are still called to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. That means in Thailand as Margie does, in South Africa as Nathan and Diane are, in Moranbah as Luke and Julia are, but it's also here in Tewantin, in Sunshine Beach, in Noosaville, in Peregian, in Doonan, Cooroy, Peregian, Eumundi, Gympie, Nambour, in the schools, at the gym, at the supermarket, in the office, in the staff room, at uni, on the sports field, or the golf course, or the bowling green, at bridge, or on the bridge fishing.

We can make the connection between God's story and the stories of our friends or family or colleagues.

2000 yrs ago it wasn't that the apostles looked for excuses to not speak. But we need to be realistic that we do. And we need to name them, and support one another in naming them and encouraging one another to not doubt God's ability either in us, or his ability to bring change to others.

But as this passage tells us, we also need to be realistic that people did and still do rail against this message that we have.

People don't want to hear it, and people will actively fight against it, and some will incite others to also actively fight against it.

Paul's message was simple. Jesus has been raised from the dead. And through him, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from sin.

So let's pray that God's Spirit, who has called us to be witnesses, will enable us to carry it out. The truth of the resurrection compels us. Amen.