



Ekklesia: Sends and Statys

June 7, 2015

Acts 17:13-15

Our sermon series, "Ecclesia," is from two Greek words, "Ek" ("from") and "kaleo" ("to call") = "those called out of." The "church" are "those who are called out of" the world to live for Christ.

We looked last week in Acts 17 of Paul in Thessalonica. This was a major city on a major road in Greece. The Romans built this road in the 2nd century BC. This is how they could get overland, without using a boat, to the Middle East. A Christian presence in Thessalonica could help the gospel spread east and west, as well as south to Athens. There was TRIUMPH (converts) in Acts 17:1-4. However, TROUBLE and TRIALS followed:

Acts 17:5-9 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

The accusation was a political one – don't cause Rome trouble. The NBC TV series "A.D." has shown Caiaphas (Jewish High Priest in Jerusalem) and Pontius Pilate (Roman Governor in Israel). Certainly liberties have been taken with the scripture, but the story illustrates

how nobody messed with Rome. The trump card used to crucify Jesus was he was “the King of the Jews.”

The accusation in Thessalonica was also a spiritual one – that they had another king, Jesus. The early Christians were turning the world upside down because they had another king, one called Jesus.

Here’s last week’s text: Acts 17:10-12 *As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*

The Good News = they are making progress. The Bad News = agitators follow them.

Acts 17:13-15 *When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.*

Berea was about 60 miles away – they don’t have cars – so they are really going to go out of their way to stir things up. There’s really a certain amount of people who’ll stir things up in a negative way.

My message today is about the interplay of 2 words used in this text:

1.) **sent** *Paul to the coast* The Old Testament is filled with people who have been sent. The major people God sent were Abraham and Moses. Joseph was a major player, too: Gen 45:7-9 *But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.*

Ex 3:14 *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

God is a sending God. **"GO!"** is one of the favorite words God speaks to people. Jesus told his disciples to "Go." The one who says "Go!" is the one who's in charge.

God says "Go!" That's one side of the coin. The other side is US. God Sends – We Go! We are sent! God sent John the Baptist. Jesus sent His disciples on mission. The Holy Spirit sent Paul.

The word "Apostle" means "sent." Some "GO" (apostles, prophets, evangelists) while others STAY (pastors and teachers). The bottom line = to prepare God's people for works of service....

The question becomes – were the original Apostles the ONLY ones Jesus intended to send or are there people who are still be called, sent and deployed for ministry? The answer might be: has the church reached unity in the faith, knowledge in the song of God, become mature and attained the whole measure of the fullness of Christ? It's a rhetorical question – God is still sending people. Who do you know who has been sent?

It's a wonderful thing to feel like you've been "sent." That is, someone else has identified you as having a special mission in life. That person, or God, gives you directions. The folks who've been sent are the ones who usually have the most interesting stories.

There's a time for everything. There's a time to be comforted and a time to be discomforted. If Paul had not had opposition but had had a nice leisurely R&R stay at Berea and had not gone to Athens, then he'd not have gone to Corinth, either. Thus, we'd not have 1 & 2 Corinthians. Adversity and hard times can make us grumpy grumblers. Adversity and hard times can also make us resilient. We can find strength we didn't know we had. Our own adversity can also enable us to feel empathy for others who are going through hard times. Paul knew both: Phil 4:12-13 *I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in*

any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. (RSV)

In today's bulletin, we have Kylee Broadhurst's article. She's a U of A college student who has gone on mission trips. She recognizes that there's excitement and as she says "romance" from going. However, there's also discomfort, struggle and pain. Being "sent" is not all fun and games. Being sent means leaving home. God often uses difficult things to further His work

2.) *but Silas and Timothy **stayed** at Berea.* Silas and Timothy weren't FROM Berea (they'd been "sent" there, too), and they didn't stay there for the rest of their lives. They left later and went elsewhere, too. But for now, they were going to stay at Berea to develop the believers there.

For some, it'd be easier to be sent to a foreign country to witness for Christ than it would be to stay where they are and live for Christ. A woman was dug out of the ruins of her home during the blitz of London in World War II. She spent hours in the debris before they found her. Someone asked: "Where's your husband?" She said: "He's fighting in Libya – the BLOODY COWARD!"

Ephesians 4:11-13 ***It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***

Yet, "Staying" is not truly a permanent address. I spoke with someone the other day who was helping her mom move after having lived in the same house in Wisconsin for 52 years. Even if we live in the same house for 50 years, that will not be our ultimate home. We may stay for a while, but we're also going to be sent somewhere else. *But in*

keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. 2 Peter 3:13

Jesus has gone to create a new home for us in heaven. Thus, we must not become too attached to our earthly possessions.

A distraught man furiously rode his horse up to John Wesley, shouting, "Mr. Wesley, Mr. Wesley, something terrible has happened. Your house has burned to the ground!" Weighing the news for the moment, Wesley replied, "No. The Lord's house burned to the ground. That means one less responsibility for me." I've got to tell you, this story has always bothered me. If that happened to me, I'd not have such a cavalier approach. Though I'm not a materialistic person, I'd be thinking about my memories AND the new responsibilities I'd have because my house burned down.

But there is a very important truth that Wesley captured – life's basic reality is that God is the owner of all things, and we are simply his stewards. In many ways, I don't own a thing. When I die, EVERYTHING I have will be given (or taken) away. And of course, we are all going to die! Thus, I need to learn to hold things gently now. I also must learn to be GENEROUS with what I have. When we see ourselves as owners, rather than as care-takers or "stewards" of what God has entrusted to us, we've nudged God out of the way. That's why God asks for us to give 10%. To not give 10% is the equivalent of stealing from God. I haven't always tithed. I heard about it though, and it was lifted up to me. But when I was younger felt it was something for older people to do. When I was working in college as a youth director I got a financial giving record from the church. I remember the financial secretary handed me my statement with a look of disapproval. I'd only given a few dollars. It wasn't 10% - it wasn't 1% it was more like .1% if that. When I was in seminary, we were very poor. We didn't take food stamps, but it was close. Then I became a pastor. Our initial salary in 1979 was \$10,500. We had to figure out when we could put gas in the car because we were poor. However, I started to do better. After all, if I was going to receive the morning offering and ask others to give, I needed to set some sort of example. Honestly, I have no idea

how/when we started giving 10%. But, like my knowledge of the Christian faith, I just grew into it. We still don't give 10%. I couldn't tell you exactly what the percentage is but I'd imagine that it's around 17%. We're not wealthy people, but we've learned how to give/save and live on the rest of our income. I think giving is less about one's money and far more about one's heart.

The same is true with our children. They are not really our children. Parents who've let their children go in mission. Parents who've lost children. Parents who've lost children while in mission.

Ps 127:4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Meant to be sent out.

Note that this sermon title is "Sent AND Stays." It's not an "either/or" it's a "both/and."

We must all see ourselves as called into ministry. Sometimes we are sent to new places. Being sent always involves a certain amount of risk. Relationships and environments are brand new. It can be quite disorienting. These are times of exploration often filled with uncertainty.

Sometimes we are called to stay where we are and to stay put for a long time.

All of us are both sent/stay. It's important to understand that those who are "sent" also "stay" (Paul had to stay somewhere in Athens or Corinth), and while we are staying, we must never forget that we are "sent" in mission. If we feel we don't have a place to stay when we are sent we feel homeless and relationally impoverished (lonely); if we forget that we are sent when we stay some place we lose our sense of mission and feel 2nd class.

Overwhelming, there are VERY few of us who have been SENT to a special place for the purpose of ministry. Pastors/missionaries are. But I want to knock down the walls which we've erected about the business of being "SENT." "GO!" isn't just for "professional Christians." Go is for

EVERYONE! The degree in which we feel called to “GO!” in mission while we are STAYING will determine the effectiveness of Ecclesia. If you think, “Well, I’m not a “SENT” person,” then you can fall into the danger of being passive (and often, passive/aggressive). But if you feel that in the midst of “STAYING” that God has called you into ministry, then you actively engage. If you’re a teacher, you should feel a sense of call – “I’m SENT to minister to these kids, parents, and other teachers.” If you’re a dentist, you feel a call each day “I’m here to help these people; few of who want to see me.” If you’re a lawyer, you can see your life as being called to serve JUSTICE, and not just to make a living. If you’re a small business owner, you are SENT to work. You are sent as a FAMILY MEMBER, as a NEIGHBOR, when you SHOP, when you talk to telemarketers.

Here’s my question: Where are you being “sent” today? What’s God asking you to do with your life?

In the midst of your being sent, where are you staying? What relationships are you developing?