

July 26, 2015
Church Planting
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly
Acts 13:42-51

Opening words: I love this story. D.L. Moody once spoke with a woman who didn't like his method of evangelism. He replied, "I don't really like my method either. What is yours?" She answered, "I don't have one." Moody said, "I think I like mine better." At the very heart of this morning's scripture lesson is the uncomfortable topic of witnessing. How long has it been since you told someone what Jesus means to you?

This is sermon number twenty-eight in my sermon series called *Church Planting*. During the summer months, I have been preaching through the Book of Acts. This is no small task, because Acts has so much to offer. I believe the Holy Spirit is vital to our future success. Human effort and determination are not enough to revive the church. It is the Holy Spirit who created the church originally, and it must be the Holy Spirit who revives the church again. With this understanding, let us look at our scripture lesson for today, Acts 13:42-51. Let me call this message *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Acts 13:42-51 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.

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

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored 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.

Have you ever seen the movie, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*? I have to admit, it is one of my favorites. It is a western that stars Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef and Eli Wallach in the title roles respectively. Set in 1862 New Mexico, the plot revolves around the three gunslingers who are searching for Confederate gold. When it came out in

1966 it got mixed reviews. However, today it is considered a classic. However, I like *High Plains Drifter* and *The Outlaw Josie Wales* more. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* was made for \$1.2 million and grossed more than \$25 million at the box office. I have seen it countless times on television. When was the last time you watched *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*?

So what does this spaghetti western (it was made in Italy), have to do with living out the faith? What does this old movie have to do with the scripture lesson for today? The answer is simple. The title, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, makes the perfect outline for this morning's message. If you don't believe me, then let's look at the scripture lesson together.

This morning we find ourselves in the thirteenth chapter of Acts. Do you remember what has happened in the past? The answer is, a great deal. I do not have time to go back to the very beginning of the book. It will have to suffice to say that Paul and Barnabas are on their first missionary journey. According to the text, they are on the island of Cyprus and their method of teaching is straightforward. They enter a community, locate the synagogue, and tell people about Jesus. Up to this point, everyone seems to be open to their message. At first, this community, Pisidian Antioch, also seems open to their message. This town will always be remembered because it was the first town where Paul's message is recorded in the Bible.

His outline for preaching is chronological in nature. First, he tells them what God had done for them in the past. He reminds them of their nation's time in Egypt. Second, he reminds them of the period of the judges. Third, he reminds them of the period of the Kings. Then, he gets personal. He reminds them of the one who God chose from all the rest, David. Through him everything would change; through his line the Savior would be born. You may have heard of him, his name was Jesus. Now, his was a life worth remembering. His time in this world was short but it had a long-lasting effect. His sad death looked like the end, but it was just the beginning. He was resurrected. On the day that Jesus returned from the dead, salvation was made possible for all people. Anyone, regardless of nationality, can stand justified before God. I have said it a million times. Your belief in the resurrection is not optional, it is indispensable! At first, Paul's sermon was well received. It was so well received that he was invited to preach again the next week. That is when the story gets sticky.

According to our scripture lesson for today, the news of Paul's message grew through that community. It is a good thing when people respond to the word of God. It is a bad thing when they try to distort the word of God. It is an ugly thing when people try to prevent others from hearing the word of God. Do you remember how the story ends? They expelled Paul and Barnabas from the region. It is almost comical. With all the advancements that have been made in this world, people still respond to the word of God like people did 2,000 years ago. Just think about it for a moment.

The Good

This is a big day in the life of this church. For it is on this day that our youth leave on their annual mission trip. By this evening they will be in Charlotte, New York, near Rochester. Our group of twenty will be part of a camp of 400 from around the country, who will perform some basic home repairs in that community. However, the camp is more than just free manual labor. The camp is really about Jesus! Every night the entire camp will gather for worship. Every night before they go to bed, they will gather and do devotions with their own group. I am going to warn the group now that Thursday night is a special night. For it is on that night that the entire camp will be asked to commit or recommit their lives to Jesus. I do not know how many lives have been changed at a Group Work Camp. However, the organization reports that 90% of participants are closer to Jesus when leaving the camp than they were when they came to camp. I believe that figure is accurate and that is why so many have worked so hard to make this trip possible. If we are not offering this generation Jesus, then we are not offering them anything at all.

How many good people do you know? They are open to the word of God from the very beginning and their lives are transformed. That is what happened in the scripture lesson. Paul stood before the crowd and told them about Jesus. Many responded and asked him to stay longer. They wanted to hear more about Jesus. I am assuming you are a good person by your presence here today. If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, say, **"Amen!"**

The Bad

What do these ten people have in common?

- Steve Jobs
- Tina Turner
- George Harrison
- Julia Roberts
- Lew Alcindor
- Cassius Clay
- Fidel Castro
- Napoleon Bonaparte
- Brad Pitt
- Joseph Stalin

Each one of those ten people walked away from Christianity. Steve Jobs and Tina Turner became Buddhists. George Harrison and Julia Roberts became Hindu. Lew Alcindor became Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali; they became Muslim. Fidel Castro, Napoleon Bonaparte, Brad Pitt and Joseph Stalin said there was no God. How can you walk away from the faith and be something else? This is an even harder question. How can you walk away from the faith and say there is nothing at all?

How many bad people do you know? They hear the word of God but refuse to accept it. That is what happened to some in the scripture lesson. Their problem was not theological in nature, they understood what Paul was saying. Their problem was, they refused to believe it. How many people do you know who have watered down the Gospel message to fit their own opinions? The faith was never designed to be comfortable. They may not be famous, they may not be notorious, but they are bad. If you can think of one bad person, say, **"Amen!"**

The Ugly

It was back on June 24, 2015, that a Christian was shot in Suez, Egypt. It was not an accident. He was shot twice in the chest. The violence was shocking, but the reason for the shooting was sinister. He was murdered because he refused to denounce his Christian faith and accept Islam. Does anything else have to be said? The spiritual tension in our world is growing. Being a Christian is no longer a safe thing. The world seems to be against us. I hope your answer to the next question is "none".

How many ugly people do you know? They hear the word of God and reject it. As a matter of fact, they do all in their power to make sure no one hears the word of God. In the scripture lesson, a select few caused all the problems. They used their influence to have Paul and Barnabas silenced. They got them expelled so no one could hear about Jesus. If you will admit there are some ugly people in this world, say, **"Amen!"** Having said all of this, let me ask you the next question.

When was the last time you told someone what Jesus means to you? You really do not have an option. God expects you to be able to articulate your faith. God does not care about your opinion about the most current church issue. God does not care what you think about the preacher. God does not care how long you have been here or how many dinners you have served. God is not interested in church history. However, God does expect you to be able to articulate the faith. I am not talking about long, heavy theology. I am talking about your experience with Jesus. When was the last time you told someone what Jesus means to you? You know it is true. Just like Paul, you will get one of three reactions. Some will love to hear it; they are the good. Some won't want to hear it; they are the bad. Others will be mad they heard it and will try to get you to stop talking about Jesus. They are the ugly.

Last weekend, I did something I haven't done in 45 years! I went to the Trumbull County Fair. I haven't been to that fair since it moved from behind Harding High School in 1970. Things have changed a great deal over the years. When I was young there was no entrance fee to the fair, and the big entertainment was Festus from the old television western, *Gunslinger*. I remember he rode in on his mule. Those were the good old days; I hate change! I was so upset when the fair left for the country that I swore I wouldn't return. I can hold a grudge for a long time. I had nothing else scheduled last Saturday, so Kathryn and I decided to go. Have you ever been to the Trumbull County Fair? It is like many county fairs. We are welcomed by the loud

amusement park rides and the endless lines of concession trailers. I felt my cholesterol level and weight going up as I looked at them. There was a small historical exhibit in the old Bazetta Christian Church building. The few animal barns were placed in the farthest corners. I ate a gyro before I ate my fries. A stranger told me the snow cone machine was under the main grandstand, so I went to buy one. I had to eat it fast because it was leaking out of the bottom. As I was exiting the grandstand, heading to buy a sausage sandwich and an elephant ear, I was greeted by a line of salesmen. There was a guy who wanted to replace my windows and a woman who wanted to sell me the latest cookware. One man came up and welcomed me to the fair. When he shook my hand, he gave me something. As I walked toward the fried pickle trailer, I looked at it. Do you know what it was? It was one of those Bible tracts. On the front cover was the warm question: Are You Going to Hell? The question was highlighted by a sinister picture. Can I be honest with you? I answered the question, "No", and threw it into the trash can. I do not know if I appreciate his method, but I did appreciate his sincerity and concern.

What is your method of telling people about Jesus? Howard Hendricks once said, "*In the midst of a generation screaming for answers, Christians are stuttering.*" Your job is not to force them into accepting Jesus. Your job is to tell them what Jesus has done for you. God will do the rest. What has Jesus done for you lately?

Will you pray with me?