



Aldersgate
United Methodist Church
St. Louis Park, MN

DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate United Methodist Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

Sunday, April 30, 2023

Scripture: Acts 13:1-18, 14:8-18

Memory Verse ~ Acts 14:15: ... ""People, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news..."

Context: This week we skip ahead a few chapters and are introduced to the Book of Acts' central character, the Apostle Paul (aka: Saul). At least it's our introduction to him in this season of the Narrative Lectionary. The Book of Acts introduces him in chapter 7, where he is one of the people persecuting the disciples and is present at the stoning of Stephen. A couple chapters later (chapter 9) we get the relatively famous story of Saul's conversion. In two chapters, he moves from a murderous persecutor of Christians to a convert of it, and would end up being the leader in the movement of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles (not to mention the one with more ink in the New Testament than anyone else).

One of the myths about Saul/Paul is that he changed his name upon his conversion. Not so. And we see that in today's text where he is still referred to as Saul in chapter 13. He is referred to as Paul and Saul interchangeably throughout the Book of Acts, so it can get a little confusing. The reason for this is that Paul is a "traveling man" and the names "Paul" and "Saul" are merely the Greek and Hebrew forms of the same name. He moves from Greek speaking regions to more Jewish populated regions, and the book tends to refer to him by the name that corresponds to the region he is in at the time.

This week's text begins with a little set up in chapter 13 which shows us that by this time there are many leaders in the movement, some prophets and some teachers, and perhaps some prophets and teachers. As they are praying, the Holy Spirit calls upon Saul and Barnabas to go and spread the Gospel (it doesn't say "spread the Gospel" specifically, but it is implied). This is all just to give us some context for what happens in our story for this week in chapter 14. Their travels are met with mixed results, as many love what they have to say, but some feel threatened by it. To avoid trouble in Iconium, Saul and Barnabas flee to Lystra, which is where our story for this week takes place. For you geography buffs, note that this region is mostly modern-day Turkey.



Questions for Personal Devotion & Small Groups:

1. What do you hear in this story? What do you notice? What words or phrases stand out?
2. How would you respond if you saw someone (not Jesus) healing someone before your very eyes? What might you think about the person who did the healing?
3. What do you know about "Zeus" and "Hermes"? Why do you think they are named? How are they functioning in this story?
4. Why would Paul and Barnabas "tear their clothes"? When else have we seen someone "tear their clothes" like this?
5. What might be significant about Paul saying "we are mortals, just like you"?
6. Why do you think they tear their clothes?
7. How do you feel about the phrase "worthless things" in this context?
8. What is a/the "living God" (emphasis on "living")?
9. According to Paul's words, who/what is God's witness to the world?
10. How successful is Paul in converting this crowd?
11. What can we glean from or take away from this story? How does it apply to us here and now?

Prayer for Personal Devotion & Small Groups: God of wonder and of surprises, we bring our prayers for healing and for wholeness, for ourselves and for our world. We pray for doctors and nurses, anaesthetists and surgeons, biochemists and medical technicians, chaplains and auxiliaries, and all who work toward our wholeness.

We pray for dieticians and physiotherapists, chiropractors and chiropodists, dentists and opticians, psychiatrists and mental health nurses, and all who work toward our wholeness.

We pray for all charities, working amongst those who suffer life threatening illnesses, and for those who strive to find new cures for old illnesses. We pray for those who support research, and those who work alongside people each day, and all who work toward our wholeness.

We pray for family who journey through hard times with us, for the carers who seek to make our life at home easier, for health professionals working in schools and workplaces, for those who strive to find ways of making life better for us all, and all who work toward our wholeness.

May God's peace and wholeness come to us this day and every day, and to God be all the glory and the praise. Amen.

