

Theme: As You Are Going: The Church on Mission (Mt 28:16-20)

Title: And They're Off! - Acts 13:1-3

Aim: The work of God depends upon the Spirit of God & our obedience.

Intro: If you know Marcia Hakey, you know that she absolutely loves horses & particularly horse racing. Just ask her about the Kentucky Derby winner of 2023, Mage. Marcia was one of 382 owners of that horse. Needless to say, one of Marcia's favorite phrases is "And they're off!" as the announcer proclaims that the race has begun. That phrase may well best describe the 2nd ½ of the book of Acts, concentrating primarily on the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul & those who traveled w/him. Theme: As you are going – the Church on mission. Paul was set apart by God as the apostle to the Gentiles & it seems that when he was given the go-ahead, he hit the ground running. He had already been preaching the gospel & serving God but w/Acts 13, there was no turning back. In my humble opinion, in Acts 13, there are some important principles for the Church throughout history & today when it comes to being on mission w/God as we are going. Let's consider them together – Acts 13:1-3 [READ]. This short passage is chock full of important principles of mission. I) **A Church on Mission has leaders who are Spirit-filled & mission minded.** I don't know how much time had elapsed since chap.11 when some of those who were scattered because of persecution went to Antioch & preached the gospel. Barnabas was sent there to solidify the understanding of the new believers & the church in Antioch was founded. Paul & Barnabas disciplined the believers for a year. After the events of Acts 12, which ended w/Barnabas & Saul returning to Antioch from Jerusalem, where they had presented an offering of financial support for the church there due to a coming famine. Now, at the beginning of Acts 13 we note that there were some distinct leaders in the church: prophets & teachers.

Luke named them – Barnabas, whom we know; Simeon, called Niger (which means black – it is speculated that he was from the African continent & perhaps even the Simeon who was forced to carry Jesus’ cross); Lucius of Cyrene, of whom we’re told nothing else; Manaen, who had grown up w/Herod the Tetrarch (the one who had John B beheaded – certainly went in different directions) & Saul (Paul, who will be the primary character going forward). These men were not new converts but gifted & maturing. It seems evident from the context that they were Spirit-filled & mission minded. As convicting as this truth is, it is a stirring challenge to the leadership of this church & any church. If we’re to be a church on mission, we must, starting w/the pastors & elders & other leaders, be maturing, Spirit-filled, Spirit led & mission minded. To us in leadership, we must pray for the moving of God’s Spirit w/in us; we must pray for the mission of the Church & our part in it. To the rest: will you pray for your leaders to grow in Christ & be filled w/the Holy Spirit & be burdened for the work of the gospel? II) **A Church on Mission is a worshipping, God-seeking church.** It was while they were worshipping the Lord & fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke to them. It could have been, but I don’t believe it was only those 5 who were worshipping & fasting. I think it was the whole church in Antioch. That word “worshipping” in the Septuagint is “ministering.” They were ministering to the Lord, like the priests of old would do in the temple. 1 Peter 2:5 & 9 – ***“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*** When we come together to worship, we not only minister to each other & not only are ministered to by God, but we minister to God, doing what pleases Him: worship,

praise, prayer, drawing near to Him, expecting from Him but also giving to Him. They were seeking God earnestly. Fasting, in this context, was abstaining from food for a period of time set aside to seek God. They were praying as they fasted. They were seeking God's blessing. They were seeking God's direction. Knowing what we know of Paul & Barnabas, they were probably praying for the work of the Great Commission. They knew what Jesus had commanded. They knew the gospel was intended to go forth. Maybe they were praying, "Lord, what's next? Where's next?" As David Gudzik wrote, "Fasting & prayer demonstrated dependence." The work of the gospel, the mission we're to be on, depends on God working thru us. We must pray & seek His face. I think we are indeed a worshiping church & we enjoy the Holy Spirit's moving among us when we gather. But I wonder how much of a seeking church we are. We talked of that last Sunday evening at Intercessors. We don't get many at Intercessors prayer – that's not an indictment against those who don't come nor an exaltation of those who do. It is simply a fact & perhaps an indication of the heart of our church & how much we seek God. As we go thru the transition that will transpire in the next year (Lord willing) it would behoove us to be a God-seeking church, crying out to God for His blessing & His working thru us for His glory. Will you be part of that? Give Him the worship He deserves; seek Him earnestly, as if we need Him – we do! And pray for the lost & the mission to which we are called. III) **A Church on Mission is a listening & obedient church**. The Holy Spirit spoke to those gathered. It could have been an audible voice, but I really don't think so. I think the prophets present were hearing the voice of God w/in. I think one of them said openly, "I believe the Holy Spirit is telling us this;" & the others concurred. "Yes, I sense the same thing." The Holy Spirit told them to "set apart for me Barnabas & Saul, for the work to which I have called them." They were a listening church, wanting &

expecting God to speak. Do you want/expect God to speak to you. Obviously, He has spoken thru Scripture, which we must read & study, but He also speaks in concert w/Scripture (never contrary to) in our spirits/hearts/minds. The question is, are we listening? Our lives are so busy & there is so much clatter/noise all the time. Some of us have ringing in our ears, which disturbs us more than a little, but the ringing/clanging of the world is louder still. We must learn to shut it out & hear God. The only way to do that is by being still before God & practicing His presence & listening. It won't happen easily at 1st, we must learn the practice by practicing. Then the Antioch Christians, having heard from God, obeyed. They continued to fast & pray, confirming & clarifying the message – very important - & then they commissioned Barnabas & Saul by laying hands on them & praying. Are we obeying? We must be obedient to the Great Commission, taking it seriously. We must pray for each other as we go. Like John suggested last week by his example, we should pray for God to give us opened doors & the words to say, to bring someone across our paths to whom we can lovingly witness. Pray & obey, by God's grace. IV) **A Church on Mission is a church of disciples making disciples**. They then sent off Barnabas & Paul, prayerfully & financially supporting them. Note that this Antioch church, having been reached by scattered Christian missionaries, were now sending out missionaries of their own. That's the way it's supposed to work. The most successful moves of missions in the world are those reached by those who have come to preach the gospel & disciple the churches & then send their own missionaries to other nations. South Korea is a great example – a people reached w/the gospel now sending missionaries into China & Vietnam & elsewhere. In AC Missions, just in the last couple of years, pastors from Tanzania are going to unreached people groups & many are coming to faith in Christ. Churches are being established. On the local scene, we who have been

reached w/the gospel are to reach others w/the gospel.& help them grow in Christ. That's the great commission – that's the work God has called us to do. Let us pray for our leaders, that we will be ever Spirit-filled & mission minded. Let us be a worshiping & God seeking church. Let us be a listening & obedient church. Let us be a church of disciples who make disciples. As we are going, let us be a church on mission.