

**On Being Evangelical: Not Jealous, but Zealous for Christ!**

***On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.***

***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. 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."***

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

***The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews 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. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.***

Well, the official name of our church is, "St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Arlington, Minnesota." That's quite a mouthful. When I answer the phone, I usually say, "St. Paul's Lutheran, Pastor Rauh speaking." Much easier. When someone asks you which church you belong to, you probably just say, "St. Paul's." We often drop the "Evangelical" part because it takes longer to say those five syllables.

We may not always say "evangelical," but I hope and pray we never drop it in practice. Evangelical is simply a transliteration of the Greek, "*euangelion*," which means, "good news" or "gospel." What does it mean to be evangelical? What does it mean that we are a gospel church? We see why in our text from the Book of Acts. And it is all a matter of one letter. Either we are J - ealous for the church or we are Z - ealous for Christ.

*I. Being evangelical does not mean that we are jealous for Christ.*

Pisidian Antioch was a Roman outpost located in the hills of modern central Turkey. It was much like the old forts in the wild west days. Pisidian Antioch had several thousand inhabitants including soldiers and their wives, government administrators, traders, merchants, and retired Roman soldiers who were given land in the hopes of colonizing the area. There was also a well-established Jewish community with their own synagogue. Then Paul and Barnabas came. On the Sabbath, Paul and Barnabas appeared in the synagogue where they preached a sermon. The members of the church asked Paul to come back the following week. What happened? Thousands of people, the whole city, showed up.

Can you imagine that happening here? Just think of 2,500 or more people showing up here one Sunday morning. The ushers would scramble to set up chairs. The secretary would rush down and run off more copies of the bulletin. Someone would get on the phone and try to find a larger facility to accommodate them all. Our church is big, but not that big.

What caused this? Radio and television was not invented yet. There were no printing presses to run off some quick posters. We do know that some of those Jews and God-fearing gentiles followed Paul and Barnabas during the week to learn more. I think it was the church members who spread the word. "Hey come with me to our church this weekend."

Then Paul preached his second sermon. ***"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. . . . 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." When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*** What an amazing scene! Yes, some didn't believe. It's not that God was worked less on the their hearts. They simply rejected the message and yet they still had a good impression of this new Christian religion. But many believed. Imagine those gentiles who bowed down to idols most of their lives and no matter what they did they just couldn't satisfactorily answer the question, "What would happen if I stood before that God today?" They heard about Jesus and their hearts were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. It even tells us why they believed. They who were appointed to eternal life. They did not bring themselves to faith. Nor did Paul. God did.

But this wonderful event was marred. ***"When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. 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."*** This bothered some of the Jews. Suddenly their church didn't seem like their church anymore. Then Paul spoke about forgiveness for everyone, not just Jews. Everyone will be treated equally by God. Even if you hated God most of your life, if you believe you will receive the same things as those who believed since the cradle. That quiet, comfortable church was threatened by hundreds if not thousands of outsiders. They became jealous. They spoke abusively about Paul's sermon. They got some of the prominent women and government officials to pass laws and Paul and Barnabas were forced to leave.

What would happen if dozens and hundreds of people want to join us here? It would be hard to keep with all the Bible information classes. And they come from all kinds of different cultures. Some might be Germans but then there would be a bunch from Mexico, Somalia and the Hmong. And instead of just sitting there doing nothing, they agree to serve on committees, the council, and everything else. You look in the bulletin and you notice that at the picnic they will not serve hamburgers and hot dogs but fried chicken feet. The voters met and decided to make Saturday night the English service, 8:00 Sunday morning the Spanish service, and the 10:30 service Chinese.

That is a little bit of an exaggeration, but it would be a shock. Would it fill us with joy that so many more are turning to God or would we, too, feel jealous? There is a difference between envy and jealousy. Envy is wanting something you can't have; jealousy is a refusing to share something you do have. It is good, sometimes, to be jealous. God describes himself as a jealous God who doesn't want his people to worship other gods. It is good for husbands to be a little jealous for their wives. Jealousy can be good.

But jealousy can be bad, too. Those Jews in Pisidian Antioch thought they were defending the Bible but they were actually committing a sin and opposing the Bible and God. They didn't want to share their God. They didn't want to share their church. Paul tried to point that out to them by quoting the Bible to them that the message of forgiveness is for the gentiles too, but they were blinded by their jealousy and actually became God's enemies by resisting his salvation for all.

## *II. Being evangelical means being zealous to share Christ.*

Jealousy draws lines where lines are not drawn. God wants all men to be saved. Jealousy says I want only a few to be saved. We know it is wrong to be jealous. But how do we overcome it? A key here is to understand that we are not special or more worthy than others. It also helps to see how zealous Jesus is for all sinners. Let's look at the difference of two other words: sympathy and empathy. Sympathy means you feel sorry for someone. Empathy means you know exactly how the other feels because you feel it, too. Jesus was sympathetic. Many times he looked upon the crowds with compassion. He had pity on them.

But Jesus was also empathetic. Jesus knows what it means to be tempted because he was tempted in every way as we are. Jesus suffered as we do. Jesus cried, wept, and felt lonely. He knows first hand what it is like to be hated by God, to be condemned to hell, to be in hell. That is how Jesus served as our Savior, with sympathetic empathy. He became sin for us. He died for us. He went to hell for us. He rose from the dead for us. He did all of this so we don't have to face an angry God or be held accountable for our sinful lives. And he did it for all sinners.

This is what "evangelical" means. It is the good news of the Bible. It is the gospel. It tells us we have a Savior. That is what it means to be evangelical, to hear, learn, believe and live in the gospel, the forgiveness of Christ.

So being evangelical is a difference of one letter, from a j to a z, from being jealous to being zealous. Being evangelical doesn't mean we have to give up our organ or diet or the way we dress or talk. But we can still be evangelical when it is known that we want to share the gospel message of Jesus Christ with all and not just some. So, if you see someone new in the community or who doesn't know Christ as their Savior, do as they did in Pisidian Antioch. Invite them. But let's admit it, a visitor may feel strange in our church if he is not accustomed to a liturgy, our hymnal, the way we do things here. So we want to be evangelical when we meet him with a warm greeting to make him feel welcome. It means we actually sit next to him in church even if it isn't in your pew and help him and walk him through the liturgy and hymns. You are so zealous you invite him to a Bible information class and volunteer to come along.

We are evangelical. Our name, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, says we are. But don't rely on a name. Be evangelical. Instead of being jealous of our Church, be zealous for Christ. He was zealous to save you. Be zealous to share him. INJ Amen.