

Acts 11:22-24  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
September 20 & 21, 2015

<sup>22</sup> News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

It was the last run of their first day of another great family vacation for Todd and Tara Storch and their three children. It was March of 2010, and it was their spring break. It was the first time that they, as an entire family, had gone on a ski trip in the mountains of Colorado all together. They headed up to the mountains as they began their great trip. What followed for them was every parent's worst nightmare: a funeral, a burial, and many questions and tears. Their oldest daughter was skiing down the mountain with Dad behind her recording the run. She lost control and went into the trees, and from that accident she lost her life. (Family Christian)

Following the accident, her parents were asked if they would allow her organs to be donated. Tara had only one request: she wanted to hear the heart of daughter after the transplant. Their wish was granted. Even though the heart was now in another body, they still heard the heartbeat of their daughter. When God hears our hearts beat, doesn't he still hear the heartbeat of his Son? Spiritually, our hearts are dead. They have failed. Life was only given back through Jesus' heart that had stopped beating on the cross. But his heart was also brought back to life after 3 days. Through faith, you and I trust and hold on to that beating heart of Jesus. His heart changes our hearts. As the Apostle Paul says: **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."** All of this is only possible because of God's grace.

What is *grace*? We use that word all the time. The bank will give us a *grace* period before we get penalized for a late payment. We talk about a figure skater as being *graceful* as she does her routine. We use that word many times at church and in our hymns as we sing about God's amazing *grace*. It was God's *Grace*, his *underserved love*, that changed the hearts of people that were living in a city called Antioch. It had such an impact upon their hearts, it was the first place that the believers in Christ became known as **"Christ"**ians. It is God's amazing love that he just pours over us again and again and again. It is God's love that brings us to faith. It is God's grace that forgives our sins. It is God's grace that once again brings life to a heart that is dead without Christ.

Today, we begin to celebrate God's amazing grace. For a 150 years here at St. Paul's, God's Grace has been preached and taught. Even though the buildings have changed, the ones proclaiming that Grace in those building have changed, the people hearing that Grace have changed, it is the same grace that has been taught and heard for all those years. The words that the Apostle Paul declared are still true: **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Rom 5:8) As we, the people and friends of **St. Paul's** Lutheran Church, gather together, we **Celebrate God's Grace**. Over the next four weeks, we will look at different aspects of God's Grace. Today, we see that it is **God Grace that Changes Hearts**.

Times had gotten bad for the early Christian Church. Not everyone was happy with these early Christians. The persecutions would increase. They had started in Jerusalem, but they didn't stop the spread of God's Grace to others. As the Christians were forced to scatter all over the world - that message of Grace went with them. Nowhere was that more apparent with the believers in a city called Antioch. When Barnabus got there, he was amazed at what he saw. God's love was shining through every word, every action, every thought of these early Christians.

Satan doesn't want that love of Christ to shine through us. He wants people to complain and bicker. He wants us to play the *blame game*. After all, he started it in the Garden of Eden. Over the past 150 years, Satan has tried all of those things. But we have a Savior who changes things. We have a Savior who changes our hearts. He takes those dead hearts of people, and gives them life. As I have told some, that as I have read over again some of the historical of St. Paul's and read meeting minutes in the past couple of weeks, Solomon's words are true: **"What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."** (Eccl 1:9) Yet, it is really clear that God's Grace is there. Generation after generation you can **"the evidence of the grace of God."** When Satan tries to tempt us to throw

away that grace, that undeserved love of God, we can't let that happen. We can't do that on our own, though. We need God's help. God is the greatest gift this world has ever received. He gave that gift for you. Luke writes: **"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."** (Luke 2:11) Three months from this week, we celebrate that gift being given to us as we celebrate Christmas. Maybe some of you are already thinking about that special gift you wish to give that special person in your life. Think of the special gift that God has given you. God's grace – it changes lives.

As I have looked back into the history of St. Paul's, it is also clear that God's Grace has walked in the front door of God's people's hearts. It also pushes our selfishness, our self-centeredness, our sins out the back door. It is God's Grace that directs everything we do in this life. Last Sunday evening, my wife and I went up to our cemetery on College Avenue. Our main purpose was to find the location of the first church. By using an old picture of the church and comparing the grave markers with what is there now, it was pretty easy to find. In fact you can see the impression in the ground that marks the footings of that first church.

As we were there, we walked around looking at some of the names of people that are there. It made you think about all the decisions that they had made 150 years ago have had an impact today on where this congregation is at today. If they came walking through that door today, what would they see? They wouldn't see just a beautiful building, but they would see hearts changed by God. They would see **"the evidence of the grace of God."** It is that grace, that love of God, that needs to come out of everything that we say or do. Give thanks to God for all the grace that God has poured out on you. You don't deserve it. Not one of us does. Yet, he keeps pouring it out. Listen to the heart of Jesus that continues to beat inside of you through faith in Jesus. Amen.