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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Epiphany 3

Acts 13:1-5
"Where Mission Work Begins"

May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ...

Mission work is exciting. Talk about the Lord blessing His Word through our missionaries in far off lands, and you can see the interest level go up on faces. I've seen it as hundreds of pastors, teachers and laymen at a convention listen with undivided attention to how in a dozen years, our church body has taught more than 43,000 children and adults about Jesus in Pakistan, a land where less than 2% of the population are Christian. On my member visits, I've heard several people talk about how they loved to hear Pastor Reid speak about work in Indonesia, while he was still here.

But might we sometimes think that the excitement of mission work is only in far off, distant places, and has nothing to do with us here in Sun Prairie? If so, I pray our second lesson from Acts leads us see how closely connected we are to this important work, as we think about **Where Mission Work Begins.**

The Bible book of Acts contains the most amazing record of mission work in history. Thousands of miles travelled by ship and on foot. Dozens of churches started. The good news of God's loves in Jesus brought to tens of thousands. Thirteen books of the Bible, given by the Holy Spirit through the hand of the lead missionary, the Apostle Paul. Paul would even stand before the Roman Emperor!

But when our reading begins, none of that had happened. Paul was still better known by the Jewish version of his name: **Saul**. So here is where it all begins: **Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen... and Saul... the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."**

Fifteen years earlier, this same **Saul** had tried to wipe out the Christian church. But the Lord Jesus had changed His heart, calling him to faith and also called him to be an Apostle and missionary. For the the past year **Saul** had been one of the five called workers who taught God's Word at the **church at Antioch**, in what is today, Syria.

But now, **at Antioch**, the Holy Spirit was **calling Paul for the work** which would eventually include journeys across Asia and Europe. So the church of believers in Antioch had an important role to play in Paul and Barnabas' mission work. **After they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.**

The **Church at Antioch** didn't complain they were losing 2 of their fiver pastors, but were eager to see God's Word go beyond their congregation and out into the word. In a special service, they prayed for work of the missionaries. **They placed their hands on them,** to ask God to equip the men for their work and also recognizing they were going to preach about Jesus on their behalf.

(They) sent them off. This was most likely more than saying, bye, see ya! Sending **off** likely included food and money for sailing to **Cyprus** and then later to what is today, Turkey.

That the Antioch congregation helped to support this mission work is also clear from what happened in Acts 14, at the end of this first mission journey: **They gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them.** Antioch would also serve as the home base where Paul began two more of his missionary journeys.

We usually call them, “Paul’s Missionary Journeys.” But since the Lord used those Christians at Antioch to pray for and support this preaching about Jesus across the Mediterranean, we could also in a way call them: “Antioch’s missionary journeys.” For, that’s **where this mission work began.**

Thinking of it like that, helps us see how closely we are connected to all the exciting mission work God is doing through our Synod in 23 foreign countries, plus Canada and home missions right in the U.S. You can learn more about those mission fields through the

WELS website. In some important ways, that **mission work begins** right here at Peace.

Just as the Holy Spirit used the **Church at Antioch** to send out Paul and Barnabas to work on their behalf, so our synod's home and world missionaries are called by God through our church body to work on our behalf. They teach and preach about Jesus' love in places where we are not able to go.

We call it WELS mission work. But remember the WELS is not a building in Pewaukee, but it is you and me in our congregation, along with other Christians united by the conviction to be faithful to what God says in His Word. We join together with these like-minded believers to do together the work that we can't do on our own, like sending out missionaries to put into action our faith in Jesus' command: **Go and make disciples of all nations.**

Like the Christians at **Antioch**, we support that work with our prayers that the Lord would bless the work of the missionaries who go in our name. Like the Christians at **Antioch**, we support that work with our offerings. In addition to supporting the teaching of

Jesus in our church and school and at Lakeside and our synod schools, our offerings are also used to send pastors and teachers to proclaim Christ throughout the world.

Think how exciting that makes what we do in worship! When we pray for missions and bring our offerings to the altar we are helping do mission work, bringing the Lord's Word to India, Haiti, the Ukraine, Malawi, Zambia, Thailand, Nepal, Indonesia and more! Let us realize this is not *just* WELS mission work, but it is also Peace's mission work. For with our prayers and offerings, right here is **where mission work beings**.

Think of how this can also apply to our expansion. Who knows, maybe the Lord will use a little boy who learns about Jesus through our Grow in Peace daycare to someday be a missionary pastor, or a young girl in our preschool to one day teach English in another country and tell the people she interacts with about the Lord's love.

And don't forget the important role of all who serve the Lord in other callings, and yet share in the work of telling the good news of Jesus in their personal lives

and in their support of this or another congregation as they are built up in the Word in worship, school, Bible class and Sunday School. Isn't it exciting that the Lord uses us to share His message, that **mission work begins** right here?!

Of course it's also a bit scary. After all, we are sinners with faults and failings, including not loving God and caring about souls enough to pray and support mission work in all its forms as it deserves. When we see pictures of people in other lands, or a new family come into our neighborhood, is the first question that comes: Have they heard about the Savior?

Do our offerings sometimes lack the joyful generosity that sees it's a glorious privilege to get to share in the Lord's work of bringing His Word to the world? How easy it can be to focus in on ourselves and whatever we're busy with at the moment, rather than looking out for ways to share Christ's love with others or support those who God has called to do so for us.

But don't stop with confessing these and all our sins that condemn us. Be sure to also find comfort in God's saving promises.

Remember, in the most important way of all, **mission work** does not **begin** with us. Rather it **begins** with and depends on the Lord. It began in the heart of the one true God, a heart so filled unearned, amazing love for sinners, that **He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all** (Ro 8:32).

Thank God it begins the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who knew exactly what God's mission to save us would cost him: the pain of the cross, the punishment for our every sin laid on His sinless soul. Yes, Jesus knew it, and yet because His heart is filled with mercy and compassion, He willingly suffered it all, so that washed in His forgiving blood, we will live with Him forever in joys beyond our imagination! Thank God that for us and in our place, Jesus never turned aside from His mission to rescue us!

And thank God, **mission work** begins with the Holy Spirit who through His Word, through Baptism changed our hearts from dead unbelief to living faith in God's free forgiveness. Praise the Lord, this Triune God has kept us in faith, so that we know the Lord still welcomes and forgives us this very day!

Because **mission work begins with the Lord**, because He has brought His saving mission to you, you are one of his dearly loved people who will live forever. He has changed your heart and filled it with His amazing love and peace.

We are therefore people who have the privilege and power in Christ to support and send out preachers and teachers of God's Word. Remember, the Lord is **where mission work begins** and He has called us to continue it. Lord help us do so! Amen.

The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. Amen.