

**In the name of Jesus Christ, the light of salvation for all people, Amen.**

<sup>38</sup> “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. <sup>40</sup> Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: <sup>41</sup> ”“Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.””

<sup>42</sup> As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup> When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

<sup>44</sup> On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> 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.””

<sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. **This is God’s Word.**

**Dear Fellow Gentiles,**

In the 1930s, there was a woman who was baking cookies. She was using an old old recipe for butter cookies, but she wanted to try something new – a small change to the recipe. She wanted to make chocolate-flavored cookies and so she cut up a chocolate bar and put the chunks in the batter, expecting them to melt when baked and turn the butter cookies into tasty chocolate cookies. 20 minutes later she opened the oven and was surprised to see butter cookies studded with gooey chocolate chips. It had appeared that she failed, but her mistake became one of the most favorite cookies of all time.

What she had was a successful failure. Things didn’t turn out the way she was expecting, but the end result was even better than anticipated.

This portion of scripture before us today is about successful failure as well. In it We see failures: Gentiles who didn’t quite belong in the Jewish synagogue and a missionary who was run out of town in disgrace. And yet we see success as well. People, who despite their failures, are called into the kingdom of God and a church that looked weak on the outside but was flourishing in the things that are most important. This portion of scripture encourages us by showing us that on our own we are spiritual failures but Christ turns us into successful failures.

**I.** When we think of successful failures we don’t have to look far. The ministry of Jesus could be called a successful failure. It started out great. Many people wanted to hear his message and see him heal people and perform miracles. But the Pharisees had a problem with Jesus and his message. That’s why they worked so hard to try and destroy him. When they were finally able to

get Jesus condemned and sentenced to death on the cross they figured they had turned his success into failure.

To many the cross became a symbol of failure but to the Christian – to you and I – the cross is a symbol of strength and victory. The cross was where Jesus crushed the head of the serpent. The cross is where Jesus redeemed us from the Devil. The cross is where Jesus finished his work of salvation – the cross is where the success of Jesus heals our failure of sin.

That's why Paul began his message by pointing to Jesus. **“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.”** Only faith in Jesus and his work at the cross can bring forgiveness. That was God's message for the people of Antioch Pisidian and that is God's message for you and for me.

We need that message because in God's eyes we have failed. We have failed to follow God's commands. Not just one or two but more than we want to count and we do it every day. We fail when we lie, when we gossip, when we fail to give an honest day's work to our employer, when we love our material possessions more than God, when we aren't faithful in our marriage, or when we live together without the benefit of marriage, when we use bad language, and the list could go on and on – it is at those times that we fail our gracious God – fail to love God, fail to love those around us and fail to keep his commands.

No one wants to be a failure and so what do you do? A good Pharisee would tell you to work – work hard to pay for your sins – but God's Word says repent – confess your sin and flee from temptation. By yourself you are a failure but with Christ you are a success. He has done all the work needed to pay for your sins. Trust and believe in him and he will bring you the Good News that your sins are forgiven.

That was a great message. The People of Antioch Pisidian embraced it and wanted to hear more but some Jews attacked Paul and Barnabas and worked to drive them out of town. To turn their ministry into a failure. But Paul knew his success did not depend on him. God called him to preach the good news and God would take care of the rest. What was Paul to do? The answer was in his call and in God's Word.

**II. Paul quoted the OT prophet Isaiah, “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.” <sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.”** The Gentiles were overjoyed to hear this message. They didn't have to become Jewish to be saved – all they had to do was believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the light of salvation for them, as well as for all people – including you and me.

The word of the Lord spread throughout the region. The Jews had tried to turn Paul's ministry into a failure but God turned this failure into success as Paul took the gospel message to the Gentiles and there God blessed their efforts beyond their expectations.

Beautiful Savior has been in existence for 50 years. Are we a success? We might look around at the thousands of people in our town and compare that to the handful of church goers here this morning and think, “no, I guess not. I guess we are a failure.” I would guess that there have been years where the attendance has been better but no matter how many people fill the church the Gospel is still being proclaimed. And while there are some who might not like the message, that shouldn't deter us from proclaiming it.

This morning we are celebrating the Mission and Ministry of our Church and our church body. We carry out that ministry as we proclaim the gospel, as we teach our young people in Sunday School and Catechism Class, as we attend the various Bible study opportunities, as we support mission work through our synod offerings and as we invite friends to come and worship with us. Sometimes we get caught up in saying, “That won't work, or my friends won't come.” It is easy to be a pessimist and dwell on the negative but it is more uplifting to rejoice in the ministry the Lord has given us and to rejoice in our brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we share this ministry. God has blessed us and called us to go out with the gospel and to leave the results up to him. Maybe our friend might not take our invitation but what if they do? Wouldn't that be great!

Paul and Barnabas could have easily given up, but they didn't. They kept going. When the Word was rejected in one area they moved onto another. And God turned their failure into even greater success. He can do the same for us.

We, as a congregation, have seen a lot of change throughout our history. As we consider the past we have to note how God has not changed and his Word and promises have not changed. The Lord has blessed us and he will continue to bless us because Jesus has made us a successful failure. He has redeemed us and called us to be his own. May the words before us today encourage us to put our faith into action, to look to God's Word to guide us, to support the ministry we have and to rejoice in the salvation that God has given us! Amen.