



“See, I am making all things new”

[John W. Martens](#) April 30, 2010

The readings for the Fifth Sunday of Easter wake us up, once again, to the perennial truth and current application of Scripture. Acts 14: 21-27 takes place just after Paul and Barnabas had left Lystra and Derbe, if “left” is the proper description of how Paul was escorted out of Lystra: “then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead” (14:19). Paul and Barnabas moved on to Derbe after that and then “they returned to Lystra, then on to Iconium and Antioch” (14:21). Returning to Lystra, in light of events experienced there, seems awfully bold (or foolish), but going to Iconium and Antioch seems to double down on the boldness (or foolishness), since in v.20 we learn that the people who stoned Paul in Lystra ad come “there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds.” They had a reason for going back, however, and it was always first on Paul’s list of “Things to Do”: “There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, “It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.” And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.” (14:23-24)

When Paul and Barnabas came back to strengthen the persecuted apostles, as noted above, they set elders over them, leaders and authorities within the Church, but “with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.” It is the Lord to whom we are entrusted and who will be our strength in times of suffering and hardship and the reason Paul and Barnabas could with boldness (for it is not ultimately foolishness) return to the place of their persecution. In times of persecution, we must fight to retain the faith, as easy as it can be to run away and as hard as it can be to stay. I take it that Paul and Barnabas encouraged the new converts to “continue in the faith” because many were considering leaving. They stayed because this is the way “we must enter the kingdom of God.” Yet, we also have to keep in mind what is genuine persecution of the Church, such as that described in Acts 14 and events current in Nigeria and other places of the world, for instance, and challenges to the Church based on events for which members of the body of Christ were guilty and which were hidden away and which caused great suffering for fellow Christians. Sometimes the chastisements of those who oppose the Church hurt precisely because they are correct, but this is not the same as persecution. The innocent are persecuted in Acts 14 and they retained the faith; it is important that we, too, especially when we are not being persecuted, retain the faith so that we can more boldly pronounce the Kingdom of God by persevering in the faith and living it in a manner more befitting of Jesus Christ and the kingdom to which he calls us. How can we pronounce if we cannot live it?

Whatever comes our way, whether genuine persecution or the harsh stings of deserved reproach, the path is not easy. It is worth it, though, for the promise of the world to come, yes, but also for our life in this world, even in the face of persecution or suffering. If it is God to whom and for whom we were created and ordered, then God’s way must be the way of joy in this world too, if we pay attention to the ways of Jesus. John 13:31-35 tells us to “love one another,” that the world will know we are disciples of Jesus “if,” Jesus says, “you have love for one another.” “If” renders the sentence conditional, dependent upon our behavior, but there is nothing conditional about God’s promises to us.

Revelation 21: 3-5 states, that God “will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

This is a promise to those who were and are persecuted, to those who suffer and wonder whether they can ever be whole again, to those for whom love has too seldom been experienced: “mourning and crying and pain will be no more” for God will make all things new.