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An Enviable Indictment

Text: Acts 17:1-9

We are in Thessaloniki, a free city, in this text. (It is a city to which some of us will go in July, Lord willing) Thessaloniki was not subject to rules and regulations coming from Rome. Thessaloniki was ruled by “the people” (*demos).* It was the capital of the province of Macedonia*.* Our friends, Paul and Silas, are on a mission. They have journeyed about a hundred miles from Philippi and only *passed through* Amphipolis and Apollonia. Their intended destination is Thessaloniki. As was his custom and his calling, Paul starts preaching (v. 2-3). Because the gospel was presented not just with words but also with power (1 Thessalonians 1:5), many were convinced and convicted **but not all**. Some folks went off.

Let’s talk about these men in this text. They have not been persuaded that the gospel which Paul preaches is for them. In place of their capitulation to the gospel, they spent their energy on envy (v. 5a). How did this envy manifest itself?

1. They recruited evil men from the marketplace (v.5)
2. They created a mob (v.5)
3. They stirred up trouble, setting the city in an uproar (v.5)
4. They attacked the house of Jason (v.5)

They dragged Jason, and some of his colleagues, out of the house and leveled an accusation against them. Listen to the accusation. It is one of the most complimentary insults ever uttered. The insult has four parts to it.

A. These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.

B. Jason has harbored them.

C. All these are contrarians. They are acting contrary to Caesar’s decree.

D. They say there is another king- Jesus.

There are two Greek words for *another*. *Allos* means another of the same kind. *Heteros* means another of a different kind. *Heteros* is the word used in verse 7. These people who turned the world upside were convinced that Jesus is a king *completely not like* Caesar. Jesus is a king of another kind.

If you and I are to be insulted, wouldn’t it be wonderful if we were insulted in this way?

* We turned the world upside down? These men were accused of inciting political upheaval. The same word used at the end of verse 6, for *turned the world upside down,* is used in Acts 21:38, where Paul is accused of being an Egyptian who *stirred up a rebellion.* What an enviable indictment!!!
* We provided a safe harbor for those who were doing that?

Today, Safe Harbor is a legal term, having to do with protection from liability or penalty. In this text, Jason provided physical safety to those accused of turning the world upside down.

**Illus.**

In the 1980s, the federal government was denying asylum to thousands of refugees. More than 500 congregations across the land declared themselves to be sanctuaries. They committed to providing food, clothing, and most importantly, shelter. They also offered legal advice to those seeking a new home.

That’s Jason in our text. Jason’s house was a sanctuary. Have we taken in the person who needs a safe place? A pregnant teenager? A homeless person? A student who is estranged from her/his family?

By the way, Thessaloniki was a harbor town, where boats could come in from the storm, unload, be restocked and then go out again. Jason provided harbor for people battered by the storms of ministry. That’s really not in the text but I couldn’t resist connecting “the harbors”.

The Church, born at Pentecost, is to provide **holy harbor,** like Jason.

* Have we acted contrary to the political agenda? Have we challenged Caesar???

Cf. Daniel 3:16-18.

Earlier in the Book of Acts there is the account of first century apostles who were forbidden to preach or teach in the name of Jesus (4:18). They knew they *would* not, *could* not, obey such a ban. They continued preaching and were brought before the authorities. When asked to defend their disobedient behavior they said, “*We ought to obey God rather than men.* “(5:29)

There is still a place for civil disobedience.

Let me simply call out three names**:** MLK,Jr. ; Rosa Parks; John Lewis.

**Illus**.

Another name not as well known as those three is Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian. He was very vocal about the horrific acts of the Nazi Party and preached and wrote about the danger of following Hitler. Bonhoeffer was accused of being part of a conspiracy to assassinate Adolph Hitler. On April 9, 1945, Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was stripped naked and hanged in the yard of Flossenbürg concentration camp.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the Church, whose birth we celebrate at Pentecost, were indicted on charges of turning the world upside down? Of challenging Caesar? Of standing up to oppression and oppressors. Wouldn’t it be glorious if we were more known for upsetting the status quo rather than for seeking status? What if we went up against existing structures of oppression and racism and outrageous behavior in the name of Jesus, Lord of the Church?

I’m envious of these men in this text. I want us, as the Church, to get into good trouble. I’d like it said of us: they turned the world upside down!

Amen