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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

December 21, 2014

### The Making of a Christian

*Paul responded, "Whether it is a short or a long time, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today will become like me, except for these chains."*

Acts 26:29 (Common English Bible)

The apostle Paul is in chains. He is a prisoner, arrested for preaching Christ. Now he stands before King Herod Agrippa II, perhaps the most ruthless king since Herod the Great. Paul is on display, really. The Roman governor, Festus is playing host to the King for a state dinner. The two of them are talking and Festus mentions to King Agrippa that he has in custody a rather interesting prisoner. So Agrippa says, "I want to hear the man myself." Paul, brought from his prison cell, stands before the political leadership of the day, people of considerable power. Some would see this as a frightening moment. Paul sees a congregation, and true to his calling, preaches Jesus Christ.

This is a most extraordinary moment in the history of the church. Where others would see the majestic robes of governors and kings, the gleaming jewels, and the power of "the Establishment", Paul saw human beings. More, Paul saw potential disciples of Jesus Christ. Rather than an experience of awe or of intimidation, Paul's eyes observed opportunity. So Paul preaches.

Careful attention to this story teaches the church several important lessons for our own ministry of sharing the Gospel. First, Paul is a careful observer of his context; he has an eye for his audience. So he didn't launch into a presentation of the Gospel right away. He didn't blurt out his testimony without regard for who he was speaking to. Nor did he forget that he was a prisoner, brought to stand before the authorities in his chains. So he begins with the due respect for the governor and King. He offers a complement to the King, "You understand well all the Jewish customs and controversies." Yet, before the governor and King could brace themselves, Paul launches into the story of his encounter with Jesus and his subsequent faith.

The second lesson Paul offers here is that anyone – absolutely anyone without exception - is a potential disciple of Jesus! Does the church believe that today? A close attention to the conversation of many in the church today reveals the prevailing attitude that only a fraction of those living around us can be considered potential members of the Church of Christ. Many are simply "written-off" because they are the wrong demographic or "not our type." Paul's witness calls the modern church to end this club mentality and recognize that Christ's invitation is to all people.

Hope for a fresh vitality in the church is found in this one chapter from the Book of Acts. That vitality begins with a renewed and personal loyalty to the person of Jesus Christ. By some act of will each person must say in the depth of their hearts "My Lord and my God." This confession, deeply felt results in the compulsion to communicate that confession to others. Such a compulsion does not discriminate. The confession is offered without hesitation. The process of a compelling witness begins, and continues with a personal and positive response to Jesus' love, power and presence. Vitality will accept nothing less.

*Prayer: Again, this morning, I give myself to Jesus. So pierce my heart with Your presence and love that I, all of my life, may give witness to Your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Doug Hood

*Reprinted from Dr. Hood's December 11, 2014 blog posting.*