

The Antioch Church
Rev. Kim Engelmann
West Valley Presbyterian Church

SERMON ON ACTS 11:25-26, 13:1-3

Carlton – I want to thank you so much for sharing with us today and I want to let you know that building this relationship with you and the Intervarsity Team at DeAnza College came up at our staff retreat this past week - as one of three priorities we want to pursue this year. We love what you are doing, and we are exciting about partnering with you in whatever way we can to buttress your ministry to college age youth.

How many of you saw The Warriors vs the Cleveland Cavaliers – 3rd game in the NBA play-offs.

The Cavaliers brought in Jessica Ruiz to sing the our National Anthem. (**Picture of her singing – not the video**) But then she did something different – which has kind of become a tradition for the Cavaliers. Maybe you saw it.

She stopped singing after the first stanza and held the microphone out to the packed crowd in the Quicken Loans Arena and let the people sing acapella the National Anthem, instead of her.

The crowd of spectators – old, young, middle-aged, black, white, Asian, Hispanic and more... took over singing, and joined together with amazing spirit.

As one reporter said – ***Wednesday night's rendition was particularly goose bump inducing.***

That crowd singing together brought tears to many people's eyes. You can see and hear it on YouTube if you missed it.

How often do you bring in a super star singer like Jessica Ruiz - rapper, dancer, model, singer, actress – and tell her...we're paying big bucks to get you here but you know what – after you start us off– after the first stanza - we want you to turn it over to the people.

Cause they will follow your lead, and sing with all their hearts and it will be a united stance, a community brought together, a song sung not just by one super star, but by everyone – and that's what's going to get people going...that's what's going to inspire...and even change the course of the game!!

Cause Jessica could easily have done that anthem all by herself. But it wouldn't have involved the crowd. It wouldn't have had the same effect.

I couldn't help but think of Jesus when I saw this on Youtube. I couldn't help but think how Jesus started this song we call Christianity.

He started it with 33 years of ministry 2,000 plus years ago. He walked our small planet. He taught us, he healed us, he brought us grace and mercy.

He died for us, he rose again for us...letting us know that darkness, and death are never the end.

And then he hands us the microphone folks, the church, and said "Here you go. *You* sing this song. Join in...together...unified...with one voice...be my body, the church for the world. Take over, where I left off. Do it with all your heart. Inspire, create vision, love one another, reach out with the melody of the good news of the gospel.

Do you know when it is that Jesus hands us, the people, the microphone. Its at the point that Christians often call "the great commission".

Matthew 28:19 says, "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations"

This is where Jesus commands his church to minister to all the "**ethnoi**" – meaning literally "**all the people groups**" of the world. (Matthew 28:19)

Now to the scripture that we read today...Enter stage right - the church in Antioch! (**Picture of Antioch on map**) There it is. A coastal church, strategically located on a port in a pagan gentile place where all different kinds of people rubbed shoulders – mingled together.

It was a melting pot in Antioch – like San Francisco or New York City is today. All different nationalities, cultures, races coming together.

The church in Antioch reflected that mix; it was the second largest church in the ancient Christian world– next only to the church in Jerusalem which was primarily made up of Jewish converts. Not all but most. Jerusalem was a Jewish city – a Jewish hub

But Luke, the author of Acts wants us to know that - the church Antioch was very different. It did not just exist for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well which meant it existed for all kinds of races and nationalities - before thought to be completely out of God's plan of salvation.

For the Jews - these Gentiles were unclean. They were not the chosen people. Can you imagine this shift for the Jews, as the church began to embrace others different from them? Huge change was necessary – a whole cultural shift.

To include all people meant that the Jews in one sense lost their specialness, their chosenness – cause now with Christianity they are called to embrace people who were very different than them.

And we think today...sure, sure...everyone is included in Gods plan of salvation in Jesus Christ.

But back then...believing this after years of history where the Jews were the chosen people and followed the law and the tradition of their fathers, to gain approval from God and live according to the Torah...this was a huge upheaval.

In one place in Acts the church in Jerusalem is actually grappling with this transition, trying to figure out what the Gentiles need to do in terms of following the law after they accepted Jesus Christ...and one of the things the Jerusalem Church says to the Gentiles is...*well we don't want to lay burdens on you – clearly God accepts you too...just like he does us.* But could you please not eat strangled animals and...because we still want to be able to eat with you...and we still can't bring ourselves to the point where we can throw out Jewish laws about unclean foods and eat whatever.

Do you see the struggle here? The transition that is happening. The cultural shift going on. It isn't easy for the Jews.

Acts 13 is sometimes called the great Continental Divide. Before this point God has dealt primarily with the Jews coming to Christ. From this point on, God deals primarily with the Gentiles.

Back to the text...here we go...This Antioch church's multiculturalism is dramatically displayed in the names of its leaders listed in Acts 13.

There is

Barnabas-- a wealthy Cyprus-born Jewish Levite

Simeon, called Niger -- probably a black African proselyte (some think this was Simon of Cyrene)

Lucius of Cyrene -- probably a Greco-Roman leader

Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch -- a Hellenist aristocrat

Saul -- a Tarsus-born Jew, raised in Jerusalem, a Pharisee, otherwise known by the Greco-Roman name Paul.

You couldn't get more diverse than this if you tried. Jews, Gentiles, Africans, Romans, Greeks!

The Book of Acts emphasizes the cultural diversity of the Antioch church, and tells us that it was here that the disciples were first called Christians (11:26).

Here they are first called Christians! Not before...not in Jerusalem. But here, in the church of Antioch, where there is this multi-cultural mix.

Christian means "Those of Christ," – and maybe with all this diversity they needed this term to unify them...as a body...this term was invented to describe these believers in terms of what they had in common which was Jesus- because this was an unprecedented mix.

So today...please learn that **Antioch was where diversity in the church began to happen in spades.** Jew and Gentile began to worship equally together.

The fact that its in Antioch where the new term "Christian" was used — stands as a powerful testimony to what the church is supposed to look like.

Its supposed to include all different kinds of people from all different races, nationalities and cultures.

So let's drive this home folks. Today WVPC exists in the heart of Silicon Valley, Cupertino.

Looking around this room I do not think that we adequately represent it, in terms of diversity, the community in which we exist.

How many of you would agree with me on that?

Today folks, I believe Jesus is handing us the microphone and saying go into all the world... to all the different people groups – and share the good news...**Be an Antioch church –**

And you say, "yes we want that...we exist in the hub of diversity...sounds like a good idea...but we are not sure how to do it."

Well today I want to encourage you and share with you a little bit of the vision that the staff and Christian Education along with Session is planning for the fall.

This is not a plan to simply create more for us all to do.

It is a plan to actually streamline our activities and create some things here that will draw in more of the people groups represented in Cupertino. Because I believe that God is calling us to be an Antioch church.

Its called **Wednesday Night Recharge** – a new every week event - which will pull us all together on Wed. for a time that offers multiple programs and fellowship.

We are trying very hard to do this in a way that will bring in our community and streamline our events so that we aren't burning you out – asking you to come out every night of the week for this that or the other thing.

Just on Wednesdays.

Please note: I am not sharing this with you today as a commercial.

What I want you to do as I share this with you is to begin to pray for this effort. Nothing that we do here will ever succeed unless you the people are behind it, and in prayer for it. In the text we read, the church fasted and prayed before they sent the apostles out into the community and the world

Your prayers matter. It is critical. You know I am a prayer junkie. Sometimes I even fast...Join me in praying for this.

The truth is that our church cannot continue to exist if we don't start moving in a new direction to embrace the community in which we find ourselves.

We don't have to go far to find people who are different than us. All we have to do is walk out this door. We don't have to go far to figure out that white anglo saxonism is in the minority in Cupertino.

And you say, "Yeah, its all changed...it didn't used to be this way."

But I believe God has put us here for a purpose at this time, in this season.

Because there is great need here in Cupertino as well as great accomplishments and very smart people.

And it is in meeting those needs in the community, much the way we met the need for childcare in Crash Zone, that we will begin to change and become more reflective of the Antioch church.

One of the needs here in this area is for relationships. People are brought here or come here from different countries and they have no family. West Valley Presbyterian Church is a relational, family, compassionate church.

It's a hand in glove fit!

One of our charter members and founders is Don Eldridge who is now with Jesus, but his compassion for others meant that he was always out in the community, helping someone...reaching out...Carroll McCune the same thing - and that DNA is still here in this church.

Friends, God has given us the microphone – for this time, for this place. What are we going to do?

Well one thing we're going to do - its been in the bulletin – you've seen it - but we have decided

to offer the community an ESL class – English as a second language class – here on Wed. nights.

The training that we received on this about two months ago from Christ church Milpitas is that not only do you have a chance to teach people English, but you have the chance to connect with people who may not have any connections here at all – and begin building significant relationships.

When I first started looking into this (and by the way West Valley Community Services is all over this – very excited that we are doing this) I said Lord there is no way we can possibly accomplish this, unless you raise up a leader/teacher.

The next day Frank Lemmon called me. He said, “I really want to do this. I really want to teach” Melanie Eslinger stepped up “I will help PR”. Debbie Dunkley is willing to help too foster that community. Just this past week Maria Warkentin, Ron’s wife, volunteered to help team teach with Frank.

Friends, God has been in this every step of the way, providing, and guiding. We already have two sign-ups for the class and we haven’t even started advertising it yet.

Another thing we’re going to do on Wednesday is have a music program for kids from 5-6pm – led by Steve Potter.

How many of you agree that Steve Potter has a gift with kids? Raise your hand. Do you know that Steve has done amazing things with kids choirs for years, and watched them grow by leaps and bounds.

Well this musical program from 5-6pm on Weds. Is going to be awesome and we are hoping to have some of the kids join this from MAD CAMP – that refers to Music Art and Drama Camp, that’s happening the first week of August.

Steve has already received many inquiries about MAD CAMP and he hasn’t put out his final brochures yet. The people who have inquired and are interested?

Guess what? Not one of them from this church – meaning that we are tapping into an interest/need from the community.

Again...Pray for this effort. Steve hopes to build the children’s choir from this and get those families in to worship. I am so excited.

We will also have a weekly Middle School Ministries, a Confident Kids, and various Bible Studies, along with choir/ensemble practice that’s already happening weekly on Wednesdays.

Judy McDowell and Brenda Gips and Terri Dias are working together to find a way to simply and easily provide dinner – so that no one gets burnt out.

Pray that through these efforts we become a little more like the Antioch church – ministering to all people groups in the name of Jesus.

And you can do one other thing. Have you ever heard the phrase, “Half of life is just showing up.” This all starts Wed. August 24th. Try to show up – at least for dinner – and meet some of our community.

Or stop by Frank’s ESL class and just say “hi”!

We’ve been handed the microphone – all of us – the body of Christ. We can’t just hang with our

friends...we must continue to remember that our job is to continue to finish what Jesus started... sharing the good news with all people groups...everywhere

We can't forget the community we live in. We must remember and continue to make a difference. You know, I remember my call to ministry as if it were yesterday.

Tim and I were students at Columbia University in Manhattan NY.

Tim was renting an affordable shabby apartment in Spanish Harlem and after school, since many of the parents in that building worked two jobs and couldn't be home with their kids in the afternoon, whenever we could, we opened up our apartment for the children – so they wouldn't be alone.

Often we would have 6-10 kids in our apartment...they'd come over with their roller skates and skate up and down the long hall that we had. Or they would dance in the middle of the livingroom or help me make rootbeer floats in the kitchen.

There was a rooster who lived in apartment upstairs with a family who I guess liked roosters and they would make fun of it when it went cockadoodle doo at 4:30pm out the airshaft window. The kids even came with us to church on Sundays a couple of times.

But I remember it all as if it were yesterday.

And then came the week after graduation when I was helping Tim pack up his things – getting ready to leave.

Maximo, the one with special needs who got picked on a lot was standing next to me as I was packing up the kitchen. He had black curly hair sticking out in all directions, one roller skate on the other off...he was strangely quiet that day...watching me pensively.

And then he said, "You are going off to a better life, but we have to stay here."

I just looked at him. I didn't know what to say.

Don't forget us, he said. Don't forget all the people out there.

I knew what he meant. That's why I went into the ministry. I didn't want to forget all the people out there.

You see, poverty there in Harlem was mostly financial. Here it is spiritual, just like in Antioch, that pagan gentile city – who would have thought that that was where people would first be called Christians.

But that's what the church is supposed to look like created by a God loves diversity. So, Let's start on the road to be an Antioch church.

We've been given the microphone by Jesus to finish what he started

Let's together with one voice, one heart, inspired by God's love, continue the song of the good news of the gospel...to all the people out there...whom we are told by God never to forget...

See you on Wednesdays

AMEN