

When We Became Us (Acts 11:19-30)

I was recently the guest on a podcast that was related to surfing and the surf industry

- The interviewer asked me about the death of my daughter Daisy and wanted to know how that experience had shaped me for the better. What good had come from her suffering and passing?
- Taken aback—but reminded that as God's people we should and can expect redemptive works
- Even broader culture has this sense ("What doesn't kill you...") ("Look on the bright side...") (lemonade)
- If what we believe about God and our relationship to Him is true—we should expect good to follow bad
- **James 1:2-4, NIV**
 - There is a way in which **we only, ever become fully us** through hard things
 - This text is the story of us becoming us (The Church—the Christian community)

Read verse 19 again

- The death of Stephen in chapter 7 (**a man full of the Spirit, faith, wisdom, grace, power**)
- When bad things happen to good people (**the sense of injustice**)
 - Then persecution broke out on a broad scale (**when it feels like evil is winning**)
 - The Jewish Christians had to flee their community and homes (**to be displaced—refugees**)

This is where the story could have lingered in bad places (as displaced victims of injustice) (a common story)

- But God was writing a different story (God is always doing so for you)
- God's people were living into that story (**Acts 11:19b-21, NIV**)
 - There was a general sense of living out the mission (v. 19b)
 - That was so good—they were not victims
 - But there were a few among them who saw more clearly (v. 20)
 - Not only did they refuse to take on the identity of victims and refugees—but they became adventurers on the front lines of what God was doing (even to the Gentiles)
 - They adventured with God—he was with them (v. 21)
 - As He always is... Present and Active
 - But we are not always "with Him"

I want us to notice that when they faced and stepped into (faithfully did so) a very rough space...

- ... They found God to be there (in the hardest place) (**Present and Active and working with a purpose**)
- And **so much good** came from it
 - **"A great number of people believed and turned to the Lord"** (Acts 11:21)
 - **"The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch"** (Acts 11:26)

We were becoming us (through unjust, hard, sad circumstances) (as the displaced in a foreign place)

- **We were becoming us...** And look who we became...
- We could have become so many things—for many bad things had happened to us
 - We could have become fearful
 - We could have become bitter
 - We could have become inward and insular
 - We could have remained victims and refugees (wronged, wounded and wandering)
 - But, we became **Christians!**

What is the significance of that?

- We did not take that name for ourselves
- The community to which we wandered, and where we began to live out what Jesus told us to do, looked at us and attached the title of Jesus to us as a name
- What we were becoming through hardship **looked to those who observed us like Jesus**
 - Some say it was meant to be derisive (mockingly)
 - Please God, let us be mocked for looking like Jesus!

Either way, it meant that we were arriving

- We were becoming us through suffering
- Because we did not suffer alone—Jesus was there
- And in our suffering we found meaning and purpose (mission)
- And by living for and into Jesus' mission—and not just our pain and the injustice imposed on us—**we transcended**

Here is what I mean (and this is where we really became us)

- Persecution had happened to us
 - There was no escaping the reality of that
 - We lived through it (and did so faithfully)
- But... You know you have been more fully formed into the image of Christ when it ceases to be about what happened to you and becomes about what is happening to others

Read **Acts 11:27-30**

Do you see the transcendence?

- How they have risen above their circumstances and the injustices they suffered
- How they are not living out of disappointment, or fear, or as victims
 - That causes us to live inwardly and according to scarcity...
 - **Where we are never truly free to truly give because it is always about what we lost & don't have**

But, the Christians (by the grace of God) rose above that space

- They would not be ruled by what they lost and no longer had—and so were free to love those who would themselves be losing and no longer have
- **Acts 9:29, NIV**

This is when we became us

- We had suffered injustice—but we rose
- And now, we were generous
- This is why they said we looked like Jesus (few things look more like Jesus than generosity)
 - What James spoke of, was happening for us
 - **James 1:2-4, NIV** (**mature and complete**) (through hard things)

And Jesus is the reason we can transcend the bad things that happen to us and become who we are meant to be

- **Colossians 3:1-4, NIV**
- **Mind on things above** = the qualities and essence of the things of God
 - To be ruled by those realities as opposed to the way this world works
 - **Ephesians 5:1-2, NIV**

What would it look like this week to truly be who you are in Christ?

- To **walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved you and gave Himself up for you?**

Where are we living from fear, bitterness and scarcity because of what happened to us and what we lost?

And where do you imagine Jesus to be in the space of your pain and disappointment?

- He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities...