

border in syn

9-1-91. A Chosen Instrument. Today we begin a new month, on the weekend that is traditionally regarded as the end of the summer holiday season. We also begin a new series of lessons in these continuing encounters with the word of God as written in the Bible. The subject is From the Damascus Road to Rome, and the contents of a 3-month study ask us to consider Luke's description of the Apostle Paul as it is found in the bk of the Acts of the Apostles. Today we begin with Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, and the change of his name, and his mission in life, and, as a result, of the change in the history of the world. We begin on a dusty road in what is now Syria, and we end in late November with Luke's remark, So we came to Rome. It is not far as the seasoned traveller counts distance between Damascus and Rome; with today's technology you can get there in a few hours. But in these next 13 wks we will make a different kind of journey. It will be a pilgrimage of faith, and it will be the work of God in moving the good news of the risen Lord from a small corner to the center of the world. It is an inspiring story of divine intervention in human history, and the continuation in the Xn Church of the redeeming work that Jesus was sent to do. The story we will read and discuss in this place will concentrate on the biography of St. Paul. In Latin his name means the little one, but among human beings he is a towering figure of thought and deed. His part in the developmt of Xty in the Mediterranean world, and in the foundats of Xn theology, is second to no other person in the history of the Xn faith. He was a preacher and a missionary without equal, he was an organizer and builder who founded the stepping-stones on which the Ch marched from Palestine to the pagan world of the Grks and the Romans. He was the 13th apostle, the last called and the last to meet and witness to the resurrected Xr. But he was more than that. He was a thinker whose work in explaining the gospel of Xr remains to this day the fundamental study of Xn teachers and preachers. The questions that swirled around the early believers occupied the mind of Paul. Why did God become human flesh? how can we understand the person and the work of Xr? what about God's dealings with Gentiles as well as Jews? and what is the meaning of the evidences of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers? In these and other, more practical matters, Paul put down the foundations of Xn theology and the living of the Way of the Lord in the short time that is given to us in the world. Paul said nothing about the birth of Jesus, and very little about the teachings of J. Aside from a few sentences included in his letters, we know almost nothing about the man Paul, his family, or his life before he appeared among the persecutors of Xns in Jerusalem. He was born in Tarsus, in the ancient province of Cilicia, but which the Romans governed from Syria. It was an old and well-known city, a center of learning and commerce, with a varied population and intellectual stimulation. Paul's father was a Roman citizen, and a Jew who took pride in the purity of his lineage, who bequeathed to his son an awareness of his ethnic and religious heritage. We know nothing of Paul's family, or the date of his birth, or--other than speculation--about his education. Some have pointed to the fact that he was by birth and rearing a Pharisee, one of the strictest of Jewish sects, and was also trained in Grk learning, so that he was the ideal bridge between the Hebrew covenant faith and the pagan world to which he was called. He could speak the languages, and understand the ideas, of both groups. He knew the good, and the evil, of the Gentiles and their idolatrous cults; he studied the law of Moses in Jerusalem, in what was proclaimed the very best teacher of that time. Paul's life and work made of him one of humanity's most significant and impressive personalities. The Xty which became the characteristic cultural base of western civilizt was planted in Macedonia, and from there to all of Europe, and to the Americas, and the Philippines, by the pioneering work of Paul of Tarsus. It is that person, and that work, which we shall read and discuss in the weeks which are ahead. Anyone who would like a copy of texts and topics... Our study begins with Paul's conversion experience. It is one of the most striking of all turnabouts in life and faith. The time was, most likely, in the yr a.d. 32, 18 months to 2 yrs after the crucifixion and the resurrection. The scene was the road from Jerus to Damascus, a distance of about 150 miles. People who travelled that way usually went in groups for safety, and the journey took 6 to 8 days to complete. Let us hear the words of Luke. Acts 9: 1-16. This is one of the most familiar incidents in NT. It burned unforgettably into Paul's consciousness. Luke recorded 3 versions of this crucial event; the other two are in 22 and 26. Perhaps because there the audience and the situation are different, so is the focus of each version. To compare them is instructive. That the author told the story three times in a short book should suggest its importance both to the early Ch and to us 20 centuries later. Originally Lk wrote one book, in two volumes. Later compilers separated the parts, and inserted John's gospel between Luke's two parts. Luke's intended audience was the Graeco-Roman world. To reach those readers he is the only writer of a gospel who began his narrative with the birth of Jesus, and told it, with a growing dramatic impact, all the way from Bethlehem and Nazareth, from Caesarea Philippi and Jerusalem, to Antioch and to Athens, and to Rome, the capital of the world. One of the other gospels begins with the birth, but none of the other three continue the story beyond the resurrection of Jesus. But Luke! Written about a.d. 83, after travelling with Paul, and then talking to many people who had witnessed the life and teachings of Jesus, he wrote a complete account of that miraculous event. X to his own

First, bk of Acts.

down

time. The first 8 chaps of the Acts describe the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the beginnings of the Jerusalem church. With Chap 8 the story begins to broaden its base. First there is the Ethiopian eunuch, riding along the Gaza road in his chariot, reading from that portion of Isaiah which tells of the suffering servant of God who gave his life for the salvation of the human race. Philip was sent to that road, to teach the Ethiopian the good news of Jesus. The gospel was on the move. In the next sentence, in Chap 9, we hear of the zealot Saul. He was present in 8:1, consenting to the death of Stephen, the first who died for his faith. Saul, as he himself put it in the letter to the Galatians, persecuted the Church of God exceedingly and made havoc of it. He entered house after house, dragging off men & women to prison. Some scholars would have Chap 9 follow immediately after 8:3, for it follows easily. Saul still breathed threats and murder. He was a man of strong conviction, he was a Pharisee and before the law blameless. He knew the blasphemy of idols and any representation of God. He was convinced that this new teaching was a dangerous heresy which must be stamped out. There was no middle ground between indifference and intolerance. He did not listen to the words of his teacher, the Rabbi Gamaliel, who in Acts 5 told the council, if this Way is of men it will fail, if it is of God you cannot overthrow it. Saul would do what God would do if he knew all the details. Now he wanted to go beyond Jerusalem to track down the infidels and return them for trial. After the stoning of Stephen many Christians fled Jerusalem, and some went to Damascus. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on this planet, with a large Jewish population in 1st Cen. Saul hoped to obtain the extradition of Christians for trial and punishment in Jerusalem. For that he needed letters of recommendation from Caiaphas, the same high priest who presided over the trial of Jesus two years earlier. So he set out with a party of guards to bind and deliver the Christians who were only recently Jews in good standing. Possibly on the Golan heights, on today's border between Syria and Israel, the miracle occurred. Something happened that completely revolutionized his priorities and reversed the course of his life. A bright light from heaven flashed about him, knocking him from his feet. Saul heard his name called out. Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? In this there is an important truth, that Christ identifies himself with his disciples. Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me, he said in the parable of the last judgment. He who hears you hears me, he said, and he who rejects you rejects me. (Lk 10) Now we hear it again. There is no evidence that Saul ever saw Jesus, and may not even have heard of him. But he with energy did cruel deeds in the name of the right--and in this he was neither first nor last; how many have died in the name of religion?--to the little children of the risen Lord. Saul had persecuted not only the disciples, but the Lord himself. The Church is the body of Christ; what harms the Church offends the Lord. Saul had as yet no clue as to who spoke to him. Who are you, Lord? he asked. The word Lord is not recognition of God's presence; it is the equivalent of our word Sir, addressed to someone we do not know by name. Jesus responded as God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, Ex 3--I am; I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. If you follow the KJV you will find another phrase, which RSV omits as added from 26:11. (There we learn that J spoke to Saul in the Hebrew language, and that he said that Saul was his plow-ox, and J held the goad. Paul could no more resist Jesus than the ox could resist the driver.) God in Christ is in control of each of us; George MacDonald said that the one principle of hell is, I am my own. Saul learned that J was not dead after all; he had in fact been raised from the dead, and was in God's heaven, surrounded by blazing, blinding light. It bowled him over, it picked him up and turned him around. It was a turning point in the history of Christ; it is also a hinge of history of humankind. Rise and enter the city, the voice said, and you will be told what to do. Saul did not volunteer to serve God; he was drafted. God initiated the ministry of Saul; our call may not be so dramatic, but God is the author of it. The blinded Saul was led into Damascus, and for 3 days he could not see, and he neither ate nor drank. It was the result of his shock; it was his act of repentance. W/v. 10 the focus shifts to one Ananias, a Christian in Damascus whom God will use as his agent. In a vision he is commanded to visit Saul in the house of Judas, on the Street Called Straight. That street still exists in Damascus; it is the main highway thru the city, and it runs straight from one end of the city to the other, a distance of about one mile. It may have been the only street in any ancient Greek city that was straight. Ananias did not want the assignment. He had heard of Saul, and he knew why he had come to Damascus. Note the four designations for the community of believers in this story, not yet known as the Church. They are referred to as the disciples, v. 1; as those who belong to the Way, v. 2; as the saints, v. 13; and as those who call upon the name of the Lord, v. 14. But the Lord would hear of no excuse. Go, he said. Now note, v. 15, the special mission this Saul is to perform. He is a chosen instrument, a chosen vessel in the older version; Moffatt reads it, I have chosen him to be the means of bringing my Name before the Gentiles. Christ also said, I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. To carry the gospel of God's anointed who fulfilled the prophecies of the suffering servant, by whose death we are made whole, Jesus chose Saul to be his suffering witness. Ananias did as he was commanded. He restored Saul's sight, he welcomed Saul as his brother in faith, he baptized Saul and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Christ is in control. He empowered his chief opponent to be his principal witness. He turns the world upside up. He is with us yet.

9-8-91. Barnabas and Antioch. One of this century's preeminent Xn saints and gifted writer^s was C. S. Lewis of Ireland and England. Born in 1898 and given the very best of the old-style classical education, until 1929 he was a thorough-going atheist who had no need of faith in a spiritual Lord. But then he surrendered his will and his life to God, who never gave up on him. In an autobiographical masterpiece originally published in 1956 he told the story of his early years and his conversion from doubter and disbeliever to a man of faith who used his pen to convince others of the intellectual establishment of his day to accept the great good sense to know God who is Supreme Reason. "You must picture me alone in my room at the university, Lewis wrote; night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. But meet God he did, on his knees, in his own words, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England....kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting my eyes in every direction for a chance of escape." It is a moving and inspiring testimony. But that autobiography is instructive this morning because in it C.S. Lewis spoke of the two kinds of friends every one of us needs. The first friend is the copy of ourselves, the person who first reveals to us that we are not alone in the world, the one who shares all our most secret desires and delights. There is nothing to be overcome in making him your friend, Lewis said; he and you join like raindrops on a window. The second friend is that person who disagrees with you about everything. He is not alter ego, another I; he is anti-self. He must possess similar interests, else he would not become your friend at all. But he approaches those interests from a different angle. He has read the right books but has gotten the wrong thing out of each one; he speaks your language but he mispronounces it. He is fascinating and infuriating at the same time. So the two of you go at it hammer and tongs, far into the night, night after night. Out of this perpetual dogfight a community of mind and a deep affection emerge. Friendships are the extra-special gifts of life; there are never enough of them. Someone has said that friends are like one soul in two bodies. But then there are those second kinds of friends, who in the heat of dialog hammer the mind and the spirit into new and rewarding shapes. The Bible contains a large library of narratives about friendship; friendship^s of both kinds. This morning we shall read and discuss the account of one of the most significant friendships in all the story of the Xn Ch as it was expanding into the world beyond Judea; text Acts 9, 11. Today we have the 2d lesson in a series of 13 that tell the story of the expansion of Xty from Jerusalem and Palestine into the Graeco-Roman world that lay beyond, to the West. The texts are from the 2d part of Lk's wider gospel, the bk we call the Acts of the Apostles, ^{Bk 1} which carries the account of the beginnings of Xty from the birth poems in Bethlehem, and the teachings along the way, to a cross and a tomb and a resurrection. Then, in Bk 2, Lk continued his history of the grt commission, from Judea and Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. We saw Paul last week on the road to Damascus, seeking out the believers in the Way of Xr, himself blinded and knocked off his feet by the pwr of the risen Lord. Paul was Xr's chosen vessel to carry the good news of the incarnation to the gentiles, the non-Jewish people of the Greek and Roman world. Today we watch as he began that mission. Acts 9: 26-30, 11: 19-26. The first order of business is to notice that the NT is not clear as to times and orders of events in Paul's ministry. Here we have Luke's schedule; not many days passed after the dramatic reversal of Paul's goals before he was preaching in Damascus, and he escaped over the city wall, and went directly to Jerus where he attempted to join the disciples. Some yrs earlier Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia to urge them not to exchange the gospel he had preached to them for another, perhaps more to human liking, not even if an angel from heaven were the preacher. In that autobiographical passage, Gal 1,2, he told of 3 yrs in the deserts of Arabia where presumably he meditated upon the meaning of the messianic prophecies; there is a tradition that he went to mt Sinai where Moses had received the law. Fourteen yrs later he went again to Jerus. He made it clear, he even repeated that he was not lying, that the gospel he preached he did not receive from any man; he did not learn it from Peter or James or the other apostles. It came by direct revelation from God, over years of thinking. It is even possible that he saw the Lord in other visions. What is important is that Paul was the 13th apostle, lately born as he put it, but still a witness to the resurrected Lord. Whatever be in fact the chronology, that is his authority to preach and to teach those to whom he was commissioned and ordained. Now with that, there are some extremely important matters in this text which we must consider. One of them is a person named Barnabas, another is a city named Antioch, and a third is the name given to believers in the Lord's resurrection/in that city. First the man Barnabas. He was a good man (11:24), the only person Lk called good in the Acts. Without him there may have been no Paul and no missionary journeys. He was courageous enough to risk entrapment and death if Paul's conversion were in fact a sting operation intended to catch the believers. I wonder if any of us would do what Barnabas did. Paul went to Jerus, we read v.26, and when he tried to join the church there he could not, for all were afraid of him. He had led the persecution of Xns, he was the most zealous of the activists. Was he now acting a role? was he a wolf dressed in lambskins? Was he really a disciple, so soon after he went breathing threats to seek the exiles in Damascus? It is a truth we all have to face, that when there is a radical change in our lives, the major barrier is our own past. An ambitious

End 4 / Really Joseph & Levite of Gen. 46
Acts 4 / Barnabas & encouragement of encouragement

office-seeker, perhaps for a seat in the U.S. Senate, changes his party alignment. Those he abandoned, and those he joined, are alike skeptical of so improbable a genuine change of heart. A thief who wants to become a policeman may meet grins, not all of them hidden behind a hand. People have been too often disappointed in a profession of the turning of a new leaf. We look with suspicion upon a self-announced new personality. In many cases it means that a genuine reform is not given a fair chance. We must never forget that the appearance of a new life is often real. The power of God to transform must never be ridiculed or rejected. Those of us who take pride in the common-sense realism that guides our decisions, who would play it safe and take no chances, might deny to a sincere convert the opportunity to prove it. That is why a man named Barnabas is important to the expansion of Xty. Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the apostles. It takes a strong faith to do that. No one who thinks that people are no good can do it. No one who sees only the evil in human nature can do it. In Jerus when Saul arrived there was such a person as Barnabas, and that made all the difference. The shock of adjustment to a new life, the emotional shattering that struck him down on the open road, would have been unbearable had the followers of Jesus not given him a chance. The world needs more people like Barnabas; the church needs them, those who perform the often thankless task of ministering to the criminals and addicts and the violent, need the Barnabas spirit. // The growth of Xty among the Grks & Romans is the story of Barnabas and Saul, raised to the level of Godliness. It is the story of God who took a chance on men and women whose pasts were unpromising; a God who came among people in a human personality, who got a hold on their imaginations and their souls, their minds and their learning, and made them whole and new. The next fact to know is in Chap 11. In between is the account of Peter and Cornelius in Chap 10, a significant step toward gentile converts, but one which we must pass over without even a glance. 11:19 ties directly to 8:4, where we read that the martyrdom of Stephen caused a scattering of the disciples, who went into exile much as sparks are blown from a bonfire; they went about preaching the word. 11:19 begins with the same depiction: those who were scattered because of the persecution travelled as far as Phoenicia--today's Lebanon--and Cyprus, the large island in the Mediterranean west of Phoenicia, and to Antioch, speaking the word to none but Jews. But in Antioch something new and startling in its importance happened, ~~in Antioch~~. Some believers in the Way of Xr who came there to live spoke to the Grks, preaching the Lord J. In 11:20 we feel the earth move beneath our feet, as the gospel comes to non-Jews, to people like many of us. What strikes us as we read of this epochal event is how casually it is reported. It was not the work of a committee, or a synod, or a board of education or of missions. There was no outreach committee. There were no competing groups of preachers disputing among themselves over who should control the money and get the credit. There is no record of solemn conventions and conscious deliberations. It was a turning-point in history, a momentous occasion, one of those great innovations in the religious hist of humankind, but it came as quietly as a moth's wing and as imperceptibly as an angel kiss. The important fact expressed in v.20 is that the joy of preaching Xr to pagans who knew nothing about the messianic hope, or simple morality and fidelity and integrity, was first experienced by people before Paul came on the scene. He may himself have already begun the work to which he was called on that Damascus road, in Tarsus, his hometown, we do not know. It was Paul's later work, and travels, and his ltrs, which overshadowed those earlier (and unnamed) preachers to Grks. But we must remember that Paul was not the only missionary to the non-Jews. There were churches containing many Grk converts in Damascus, and Tarsus, and also in Antioch. The city of Antioch in Syria was the capital of the east, the 3d largest in the Roman world (after Rome and Alexandria), with half-a-million inhabs in 1st Cen. Today it is unimportant, but in a.d.40 it was where things happened. 75 yrs ago there was found the Chalice of Antioch, a silver cup from 4th cen, with Xn symbols on its outside. For several centuries Antioch was the center of Xn activity. Jerusalem's church was not destroyed; it was scattered; no good thing can ever be destroyed, however it may be dispersed or changed. The hand of the Lord was upon them in Antioch. This is, as we have seen, one of the more familiar expressions in Bibl. We read it in both Ezra and Nehemiah. It means that the presence of God was with those who did his will and lived under his Lordship. A great number turned to the Lord. Those in Jerus heard of this sharing of the Holy Spirit with gentiles, and they were concerned. They sent Barnabas to Antioch. Here again he was ldr in the mission to the world beyond Judea, and the activ that quickly transferred Xn HQ from Jerus to Antioch, where it might have remained, except that Rome was a still greater city and center of the Empire. Barnabas means son of encouragement, and that he did, and was. In Antioch he saw the grace of God, and was glad; in the original Grk this is a play on words; the two words sound alike. It cannot be translated into Engl. As the numbers of converts increased, Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul to help. The first thing Barnabas did when he saw what was happening in Antioch was to remember Paul. He found him, and brought him back with him, and together they establ the church. So strong was its impact that it was there that for the first time the disciples were called Xns. The word is, in Latin and in Greek, as in English, the adjective from the noun Xr. There is no better word to use to express the unity of believers. Faith in the Lordship of Xr is the doctrine, and salvation by the mercy of God is its promise.

9-15-91. Antioch of Pisidia. As we enter the final years of the century, and of the millennium, we are living in uncertain times. A yr ago the New Yorker magazine published an article about the loss of road maps and guideposts in these days of disruption and change. For the past 40 yrs --a good Biblical number--the organizing story of budgets and plans and legislation in the U.S. has been the Cold War. That story has now failed and the country ~~is~~, (the New Yorker said), is essentially storyless. To which Atlanta Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann added, so it has always been; the story offered by the dominant empire turns out to be no story at all. Whether Egypt, or Assyria, or Babylonia, or Persia, the enslaving and beseiging power is in the prophetic view limited in time and force, and doomed. It was the voice and presence of God among them, and the story in the scriptural text, that would persist in the face of empire and cultural hegemony. Prof. Brueggemann then said: a textless Jew is no Jew at all, sure to be co-opted and sure to disappear into the woodwork. AND MY SENSE IS that a textless church is increasingly no church at all. So said Walter Brueggemann in a recent article. Today we have a lesson whose text is a sermon, the first recorded sermon preached by Paul the new convert to Xty. That incident, and that text, lead us to consider the place of preaching in the Xn community. It surely is inappropriate for a layman to speak critically of the words of the preacher, and especially in these days when our betters have defined the preacher as the infallible authority in the local church. So let us quote the words of others. John Hines, presiding bishop in the Episcopal Church, said: preaching is effective as long as the preacher expects something to happen--not because of the sermon, not even because of the preacher, but because of God. And, he added, preaching is a sacrament, and some people after partaking are never the same again. Spencer Wilson, Anglican chaplain in an English hospital: The number of good preachers may have decreased. But so has the number of good listeners, and it is the listener who sets the tone and the depth of the speaker. But let us turn to one of this century's most gifted and most inspired Xn teachers, P.T. Forsyth. In a little book published more than 80 yrs ago Forsyth discussed the act of preaching. With its preaching, he began, Xty stands or falls. Wherever the Bible is at the center of the altar, then preaching is the most distinctive feature of worship. The preacher is not an orator, who comes with an inspiration; he is a prophet, who comes with a revelation. Where the preacher's object is to secure an audience, ~~rather than your~~ Gospel, Forsyth said, preaching is sure to suffer. The orator stirs people to rally, the preacher invites them to be redeemed. Demosthenes spoke to arouse the Athenians to resist an enemy, Paul stirred his hearers to die and rise with Xr. The first apostles were neither priests nor bishops, Forsyth said; they were preachers, missionaries, heralds of the Cross and agents of the Gospel. The apostolic succession is the evangelical. Our churches are stone pulpits rather than shrines. The Bible is the preacher's starting point and his living source. It is the book, as Xr is the person, where the seeking God meets and saves the seeking human soul. Preaching is the organized Hallelujah of an ordered community, and its recurring refrain must be, What we have seen and heard of the Word of life declare we to you. Preaching needs not originality but spontaneity of power. Reality, directness, the breathing fire of faith, these are the ingredients of preaching. The preacher who does not believe, but who stages a performance, is an affront to the Holy Spirit, and to the faithful who gather for worship under the inspiration of the proclaimed word. The preacher does not approach the congregation in order to explain them to themselves, but to declare to them the fact of God in Xr. Xr is ours not because he represents our best, I am still quoting P.T. Forsyth, but because he redeems our worst, not because he set a seal upon our humanity but because he saves it, not because he elicits it but because he gives it. Preaching is the foundation-stone of worship. It is a reminder, a confession, and a revival of faith. Let us think on these things, then, as we hear once again the words of Paul--we can now call him that, for so he became in the course of the first missionary journey to the Gentiles. Acts 13: 13-17, 23-39. In the bk of Acts there are outline summaries of 5 sermons which emphasize to us the centrality of preaching in the Xn experience, and tell us how the first evangelists summed up their faith. I have read only a portion of Paul's sermon in Acts 13; it is instructive to compare all five (Chaps 2,3,7,13,17), with each other, and then with the sermons we hear in churches and on the small picture-tube in the sitting-room. Basically the sermons in the Acts say the same things, and that ought to speak volumes about the proclamation of the old revelation as opposed to novelty and innovation in the pulpit. Two things need saying before we discuss the text. One is that no one can know how much of the original sermon has been preserved in these accounts, and how much Luke the author has received a tradition and expressed it in his own words, and his own theological priorities. The other is that no one should expect today's preacher to preach these exact words, or even use the same outline. Each sermon should express the timeless revelation of an eternal God in the changing language and thought-patterns of an ephemeral present, and to meet the spiritual needs of the congregation to which it is addressed. This one was intended for a group of Jewish worshippers who knew the Hebrew scriptures, and the history of Israel's covenant promise. That is where Paul began. First we must notice the change which happened in Chap 13, Acts. It is a part of Lk's description of the first missionary journey

to the Grk world. Note, 13:1, the listing of the preachers (Prophets) and teachers at Antioch: first Barnabas, then Symeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Barnabas and Saul were sent forth by the Holy Spirit, to go to Cyprus, and then to the provinces of Asia Minor, now Turkey. V.9, Saul becomes Paul, and in v.13, moves up to first in the mission. Now Paul and his company set sail. With the beginning of the missionary activity Paul becomes the leader. They went to Antioch of Pisidia. This is one of 16 Antiochs establ by Seleucus, founder of the Seleucid Empire, all named in honor of his father, whose name was Antiochus. The Antioch Paul and Barnabas left was Antioch of Syria; this one is in the center of AsMin. The ancients knew it as Pisidian Antioch, to distinguish it from the others. There as was his custom (he) went to the synagog, to begin first with the Jews, the lost sheep of the house of Isr to whom Jesus was sent. There he was invited to speak. Waving his hands for silence and attention, he began. He preached about Xr on the basis of the OT, to testify to the resurrection, and then he gave an invitation to salvation. That means that while Paul was not one of the 12 who were witnesses from the beginning, he was an authentic preacher because he testified to the resurrection out of his own experience. The sermon itself is worth careful reading. It folwd the pattern of Peter's sermon at Pentecost, Ch 2, but it also expressed an important theme in Lk's writing--the continuity of salvation history out of one covenant and into another. Paul's sermon is as appropriate to a synagog of Jewz in a Grk city as ^{was} his words to the university convocation at Athens. Its main ideas are 1) Jesus is the divinely prophesied child of the house of David; 2) he was rejected by the Jews of Jerus, and is now offered as Savior to the Jews of the dispersion, the scattering abroad; and 3) both his crucifixion and his resurrection were foretold in scripture, and they guarantee the forgiveness of sin. Those ideas are the gospel of God in Xr, and they must be present not ^{ONLY} in a repeated creed but ^{also} in the spoken word of the sermon. The congregat was of two types; faithful and obedient Jews, and others who were God-fearers, worshippers, who were Grks. Paul addressed both groups. A century ago the great preacher Phillips Brooks was called to be Harvard Univ chaplain; he said he knew he would have little to say to the profs of divinity; "but everytime I get up into the pulpit I think of the person sitting in the last pew who may be hearing the gospel for the first time." The authentic preacher never forgets that one. The sermon itself began with reminders of Jewish history, a message his hearers could understand intellectually, and respond to emotionally. A universal mesg in a local frame, that was Paul's homiletics. Then he quickly described God's sending of a Savior--Xn preaching must always focus upon the human need for salvation--and the heart of the sermon is in vv32-33: So we now preach to you the glad news that the promise made to the fathers has been fulfilled by God for us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again. The text was Psalm 2, one of the favorite Xn proofs of the Lord's anointed, in Hebr Messiah, in Grk Xt, and the triumph of the pwr of God in giving life to the crucified Lord. Other texts are Isa 55 and Ps 16. What Paul said, Theodore Ferris wrote in his commentary, was good news, not good advice. Good advice we can get from the psych center or the newspaper columns to the lovelorn. Good news of salvation we get from the preaching of the Bible in the stone pulpit which is the place of worship. It is the good news of the rescue of the human race. It did not begin by telling people they ought to be good, but by telling them that God was good enough to do something that would save them from eternal punishmt. It is the annoucement to prisoners in a jail, The enemy has been conquered, sin and death have been overthrown, you are free. You are saved. Note, you are free, not from one set of preachers who want the pwr to divide the collection plate, but free from the pwr of evil and death. The gospel is above all else the annoucement that God has rescued from prison all who bore the burden of guilt. God kept his promise. The proof of it is the resurrection of Jesus. You rejected him; people still reject him. Even people in the pulpit reject him. But God raised him up. The only sign we shall get is the sign of Jonah, who was 3 days & nights in the belly of the fish, and then was delivered up. It is something that God did; in Jesus the promise is fulfilled. In gladness and thanksgiving we praise God, and give thanks for the gift of life and peace. For the good news of salvat has moral consequences. Salvat is the doorway into the newness of life! Because God has acted, we react in joy and the purity of holiness. Justified by faith in the God who raised Jesus, we have righteousness in his name. This is life abundantly, this is life lived on the level of God, which means eternally. When we forget that we need a savior we must hear the preached word of the authentic preacher reminding us of our need. When we are restless and dis-eased, we need healing that only confession and faith in the loving creator-God can give. How can we believe in him of whom we have never heard? and how are we to hear w/o a preacher? and how can there be a preacher unless one is sent, called, spirit-filled, serious in pleading with men and women to believe, and live? Faith gives pwr to confess in humility one's sin, and salvation gives powr to overcome the world. It gives the Ch the strength to assault the gates of Hell, and break them down, and invade the center of greed and selfishness and all that they drive us to do. I can do all things thru Xr which strengtheneth me, Paul wrote, and it is the invitation to that power and that victory that Paul called people to in Antioch of Pisidia. By Jesus every one who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Something greater than Moses is here; this is true liberty of soul, of mind, of life.

9-22-91. Worship. Forty years have gone by since Arthur Koestler wrote a devastating attack upon communism in a book entitled *The God that Failed*. In the turbulent yrs in which we live, with falling walls, seceding states, and the repudiation of the police state and philosophical defense of internatl revolution and common ownership of property, Koestler's ^{as much} prophecy as it was autobiography. The opening chapter was, not so very long ago, required reading for students of alternative economic and political systems. It describes Koestler's conversion, as a young man in Germany, to the communist cause and party. A faith is not acquired by reasoning, it began. Reason may defend an act of faith, but only after the act has been committed and the person committed to act. A faith is not acquired; it grows like a tree. Its crown points to the sky, its roots grow downward into the past and are nourished by the dark sap of the ancestral humus. The faith that Arthur Koestler acquired was in the material Utopia promised by the ideology of communism, as he put it, in that short-lived period of optimism, of that abortive spiritual renaissance, later known as the Pink Decade. To quote Koestler again, I became converted to it because I was ripe for it and lived in a disintegrating society thirsting for faith. In that/his generation was like all the rest of them. We human creatures crave a faith. Our problem is that we satisfy that yearning with gods much less attractive than the creator and father of us all. The first cmdmt of the Law that was given to Moses demands of us that we have no other gods before the Eternal God. God's competitors for our faith, and our loyalty, are not meaningless spirits. They are other gods, invented to justify the human craving for a faith that yields instant results and that asks of us no sacrifice or embarrassmt. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., the autocrat of the breakfast table, wrote in one of his essays that Human beings are idolaters, and want something to look at and kiss and hug, or throw themselves down before; they always did, they always will; and, he said, if you don't make it of wood, they will make it of words. In that is our temptation. I always enjoy reading the definitions in Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary*. Of the word Heathen he wrote: A benighted creature who has the folly to worship something that he can see and feel. There is a fundamental truth in that, and it is for those of us who put our trust in something tangible--a savings account, a strong military, a particular church govt or ritual. That, as Ambrose Bierce knew well, makes heathens of us. What we worship determines what we are, as human beings with minds and spirits, with fidelity to pledged words, and integrity down at the Treasury Dept's sale of bonds, in the workplace, and down inside ourselves. If we devote ourselves to that which is passing away, because of its immediate appeal, then we sin even when we think we are at worship; for sin is the boasting and confidence of that person who forgets her creaturehood and tries to make her own existence secure. Those competing gods promise good harvests, sound health, with fun and games and pleasures, with no stress or sense of guilt or shame. They do not deliver, to be sure, except briefly and destructively. God waits, Rabindranath Tagore said, to win back his own flowers as gifts from man's hands. That is worship. It acknowledges that this is our Father's world, and that we are creatures and dependent upon a loving God for sustenance and also for forgiveness, and it gives to God what is God's, what God could take from us by force if that were his purpose, but what only we can give freely and gladly. This morning we have a text, and a lesson about worship, and idolatry, and faith. It has lessons for us to learn and to respond to. Text Acts 14. This fall the Bible lessons ask us to travel once again with Paul and his companions, along the road from Damascus and Jerusalem to Antioch and Athens and Corinth, all the way to Rome, the capital of the ancient world. We are now in the midst of the first missionary journey, of Paul and Barnabas. I have a map that shows the principal places Paul visited on his tours; I would be pleased to send a copy of it to anyone who would like one; please call or write. Note that in Luke's account, in the Bk of the Acts, it is Paul the missionary and founder of churches who is the real Paul. A decade ago a Princeton professor named Christiaan Beker published a book about Paul in which he declared that the bk of Acts focuses upon Paul's missionary success, while minimizing the content of his theology. It is not the message and the meaning of the Xr-event that we read about; it is the person of the Apostle. In the Acts we read summaries of Paul's sermons, but not a word summarizing the letters to the churches in which he laid the foundations of Xn thinking and theology. In Acts Paul is a great speaker and no letter-writer at all; in 2 Cor 10:10 he quoted what may have been the common notion about him/that his ltrs are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account. 2 Peter 3: 15-16 says that we should pay little attn to Paul's writings, for they are hard to understand and may be distorted to serve the purposes of wicked men. So in NT we have what may be called Two Pauls, one the ltr-writer whose works were collected, and made part of the sacred scriptures, and read in the churches, but domesticated and their teachings rarely understood or used. None of the early teachers of Xn doctrine cited Paul's words, so important to us, about sin and redemption, or about faith and works. So when we read the Acts we must remember that, for whatever reason, we have only a part of Paul's career. It appears that folwg his conversion from persecutor to chosen agent of God there were 15 years of missionary activity with no writings, from a.d. 35 to 50, and then six years, 50-56, during which Paul composed his ltrs to the churches. Without the missionary effort there may

have been no European Xty, certainly not in the form and direction that it took, and then there would have been no churches of Paul to which he could write. So, to return to the morning text, we are in the first missionary journey, in the center of what is today the nation of Turkey, in ancient times called AsMin. It is a mountainous, ~~and~~ sometimes forbidding country. 80 miles the two travellers walked, from Antioch of Pisidia to Iconium, where again a riotous mob drove out the missionaries, and to the larger city of Lystra. It was the hometown of Timothy, later to be a companion and fellow worker with Paul; it was a new town only recently founded, it was a Pagan Grk city whose statues and inscriptions to Zeus and Hermes have recently been unearthed. It was so far back in the hills that most people understood but little Grk, preferring their ancient languages. It meant that the sermons of the missionaries Paul and Barnabas met with little success. There is meaning in that fact, though it is not the primary lesson we have from Lystra. Many of us who sit in the pews Sunday after Sunday cannot understand the preacher, so we doze off, or recite the latest poem we have memorized, or plan the coming week's activities, because the preacher is speaking a language we do not understand. In these perilous days that sometimes means that the pew expects a Biblical word of God's grace when and where we need it, while the preacher speaks about overcoming stress, or feeling good about ourselves, or how we should love everybody. It may also mean that the pulpit delivers a Biblical msg which confronts us, and affronts us, with its demands. But let us hear again the story of a healing in Lystra. Acts 14: 8-18. Some scholars have questioned this incident, with no real reason, because it is similar to Peter's healing of the lame man in Acts 3, and Luke must have included it here to emphasize the parallels between Peter and Paul in the college of apostles. But Luke has included so many details that he must have gotten the story from an eyewitness. It is also worth noting that in this chapter, in Paul's response to those who would worship them, there are two of the rare reminders in Acts of Paul the ltr-writer. Compare 14: 15 with 1 Thess 1: 9, and 14: 17 with Rom 1: 20. It was as far as Luke would go in reporting on Paul the man of thought and theology. Paul & Barnabas went to Lystra, and there they preached, but with little effect. Then Paul saw a lame man among the listeners, whose face revealed a faith to be made well, v. 9. Isn't that an interesting phrase? Do we have on our faces, or do we see in the faces of others, the faith to be made new and revived? If we do not, is it our lack of vision, or is it the flaw in our faces? Paul saw it, and on this lamed person it was there. He said in a loud voice, stand upon your feet. It was something the man had never been able to do. This time he could. He leaped, he sprang up, and he walked. When the crowds saw it, they said, in their local dialect, The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. Paul may not have understood the words, but he understood the actions. As it happened, there was a story, reported in Ovid's Metamorphoses, about Baucis and Philemon, who received these two Grk gods unawares, and were rewarded with the promise that they would both die at the same time, so that neither would know the pain of grief for the other. People in that region knew of the tradition, and now, in their ancient speech, they recalled it. They brought oxen and garlands of flowers to the gates of the city; these were the usual materials for a sacrifice, and the priest of Zeus--KJV turns these names into Latin, Jupiter and Mercury, who are the same as the Grk Zeus and Hermes--prepared a worship. The Xns were aghast and shocked; they tore their garments, and to the people Paul made a speech, 15-18. It is remarkable in many ways. It is the earliest speech of which we have record in which Paul spoke to a totally pagan audience. No Jew would commit the blasphemy of offering worship to a human being. This speech is like the one he made in Athens in that it is the soul of the Jew speaking to the mind of the Grks. There is but one God, whose presence is proved in all his works of nature and creation; him only must human beings worship and serve. No God can be worthy of worship if he is God only of a part of man's life. No God worthy of worship has ways that are like our own. Those people of Lystra ~~thought~~ ^{wanted} a god in whom they need not believe, for they could see with their own eyes the miraculous pwr of God in action. Faith is knowing what we cannot see, and trusting our lives with it. The relig those Grks professed was adolescent, immature, a hero-worship that expected instant results. It took visible, temporal, imperfect things and declared them to be gods. We are tempted to do the same; we worship our wealth and our nation, thinking that they can save us; we worship alcohol and drugs because they insulate us from reality; we worship Mammon, and Baal, and Momus, those spirits of immediate gratification with no obligations. We are idolaters, O.W. Holmes wrote; we want something to which we may bow down, but not commit ourselves to, not to the creative spirit who would give us new life in faith. When we trust only what can be proved to the flawed reason of humankind, when we define life as a mechanical, impersonal process of biochemistry and electricity, we are not likely to know who we really are, and the peace and contentment ~~to~~ which we are made. Paul did not speak of Xr to those people; he spoke of God, the living God who created, and who left his fingerprints in the creation, for all to see. Albert Einstein said that the most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible. We are left without an excuse if we do not see in nature the providence of God, and if we do not commit ourselves to that which satisfies our searching souls as no other faith can do. We are creatures who must worship, and what we define as the ultimate determines what we are. Let us give thanks to God for so great a salvation.

9-29-91. End of the Law. Fifteen yrs ago a scholar and teacher named Ed Sanders published a book about the relationship and the conflict between Paul the apostle and the Judaism into which he was born, and in which he was trained. It seems clear, he wrote, that the basis of Paul's theology was that blinding flash of light on the Damascus road, that big boom that created in his mind and life a universe entirely new. Paul did not take part in a philosophical, or intellectual, debate over theology and dogma, although that is clearly evident in his writings. What was also present was the element of surprise which overturned Paul's previous life-story. In a deeply psychological manner, that flash of light lit up and answered a hidden need within his soul. It ~~also~~ illuminated the distinction between faith and the theological explanation of that faith, and also the kinship between Paul's experience on that road to Damascus, and Paul's theology of the law. Sanders spoke of "patterns of religions" in discussing those events and those thoughts. When Paul accepted the Lordship of Xr, Sanders said, the logic of his conversion required a re-assessment of the Law of Moses that broke sharply with Judaism and its understanding of the function of the Law. It must have been the equivalent of an earthquake in his mind. A hitherto devout Jew, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, before the Law blameless, who set himself the mission of eradicating the blasphemous distortion of Judaism because the folwrs of Jesus ignored and abandoned the Law, he was himself compelled to the overpowering conclusion that the Law was inadequate, that within himself it did not produce the sense of righteousness he needed to feel. There must have been an intolerable tension between his persecution of Xns because they broke the Law, and his own sense that the Law was inapplicable and therefore wrong. His solution was to go with his experience, which he could not deny, and to reverse his view of both Jesus and the Law. The motive power behind his reversal was faith. Faith was to Paul above all else what everyone needed to replace a legal existence based upon good deeds and right conduct. Paul's fundamental contribution to the spiritual and intellectual understanding of Xty was his emphasis upon faith over good works as the way to righteousness and salvation. Paul was the wedge that separated Xty from Judaism, and the new covenant from the old. He used harsh words to distance himself from all that had previously stood supreme in his life. In the ltr to the Philippians he said that he counted as loss his devotion to the Law; it was far outweighed by the gain of knowing Xr J my Lord, for whose sake I did in fact lose everything. It was garbage; refuse, in RSV; dung, in KJV; much nastier is the original Grk. It was God's will that the new covenant replace the old; it was God's initiative that at the Cross one dispensation ended and another began. The prophets had foretold it; Jeremiah said it clearly: Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah; Behold, the days are coming, when I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David. In the 2d Corinthian ltr Paul wrote, God has qualified us to dispense his New Covenant, expressed in a spiritual bond; only in Xr is the old Covenant abrogated. And in the 1st Cor ltr he reminded believers that at the Last Supper J took the cup and said, this cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood. What Jesus proclaimed, and what the prophets had foreseen, Paul declared had already happened. To devout Jews, that was intolerable blasphemy. To say that Jesus who was crucified was God's Messiah was beyond acceptance; crucifixion was the death of the accursed. It was unbelievable that God's chosen one would suffer such humiliation. But much more difficult was Paul's assertion that the Law had been abrogated and made of no value. To the Jew the Law continued, forever, as proof of God's selection of the chosen people, the nation of priests. Without Paul and his insistence upon the newness of the covenant in the blood of Jesus, Xty might gradually have disappeared, as had other deviant Jewish groups, or it may have changed Judaism from within. But this is guessing. What is certain is that when Paul radically and completely rejected the Law that was the foundation of his Jewish and Phariseean tradition, he began an effort that decisively affected the course of history, and the world in which we live. As John Calvin expressed it 15 centuries later, Paul peered into the mystery of the grace of God, who saves sinners although they are unworthy, and have done no good deeds worthy of redemption. It is the conflict between old and new, between the grace of God revealed in the Law, and the grace of God revealed through faith for faith, that is the subject of today's lesson, text Acts 15. Since we met last wk in this place our planet has entered another season. Summer gives way to the fall, and winter cannot be far distant. This month, and thru the fall, the internatl series Bible lessons are based upon the bk of the Acts, and tell the story of the expanding Xn Ch into the gentile and pagan world beyond Judea, and beyond Judaism, in the life and work of St. Paul. By tradition he was a man small in stature but a giant in faith and mind. A mosaic made 300 yrs after Paul lived shows him with a balding head, a V-shaped beard, a large and curving nose, and eyebrows that meet over that nose. Whatever he looked like, his impact upon Xn history is immense and timeless. He is one of a very small circle of truly great human beings, and one of the most influential writers who ever put pen to paper. His ltrs, the Engl poet John Donne said, are thunder, and universal thunder, thunder that passes through all the world. Another poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, wrote that the ltr to the Romans is the most profound work in existence; it inspired St. Augustine, an influential African writer and thinker, and it was the principal weapon

in the Prot Revolt of 16th Century. Paul provided Xns with most of their classic forms of expression, and nearly all of the active, original, constructive thought about the meaning of the Xr-event. As we in the community of faith no longer read and discuss and preach from Paul, we risk losing not only the distinctives of the revelation, but also the congregation which once gathered to worship the God of Xr by whose grace we are forgiven, and saved. Today we have a text about a quarrel in the Church, not the first one, and certainly not the last, but one that was significant in marking out the path of the Xn way. Acts 15: 1-12. This chapter has presented more problems of interpretation and understanding than any other in the bk of Acts. Many critics have accused the writer, Luke, of misunderstanding the nature of the dispute, or of erroneously describing it. Any attempt to compare Lk's version of this incident with Paul's account in Gal 2 raises more questions than either can answer. It seems clear that despite Luke's handling of the story in this chapter there were 2 disputes going on, a fact that Luke may or may not have concealed. One of them had to do with the Jewish caution about eating with gentiles, and on a wider level with any social relats between them. In the Galatian ltr Paul denounced Peter who earlier ate with Gentiles but later drew back and separated himself, fearing what he called the circumcision party. That was a reminder of the other dispute, over the nature of the Xn faith. If non-Jews were admitted to membership in Xn Churches without passing thru the requirements of the Jewish Law, it would make the Messiah a non-Jewish savior, and it would make salvation an individual matter and no longer the especial privilege of Israel. Try to imagine how the Jewish Xns felt at Paul's mission to the gentiles. In a recent book S.G.F.Brandon has written: that the tragic death of their Master, the Messiah of Israel, at the hands of the hated Romans, should be presented as a divine act to save the gentiles from the perdition they so richly deserved, was, in their eyes, tantamount to blasphemy... in the gospel of the Jerusalem Xns it is obvious that the gentiles could have no part. Indeed, the end which that 'gospel' had in view, namely the vindication of Israel, implied both the overthrowing of Rome and the panishment of gentiles. It was an affront to them that the people who had put to death the Messiah should now receive salvation and equality from the misguided missionaries to those people. Paul knew and understood how they felt, and did everything he could to ease their hurts. But give in to them he would not. Between Peter and Paul therefore a wide gulf yawned. Peter had the stronger case with the Jewish Xns; he had known J personally, and had been appointed pastor, shepherd, who will feed the sheep. But Paul had the advantage in intellectual power and in strength of his debating ability. Paul also knew himself to be called of God to be the chosen vessel, instrument, to take the good news of God in Xr to the uttermost parts of the world, and to begin the movemt that would not cease until the end of time, the end of the age. Thus Paul and his conviction that the force of the Law had ended when J died upon the Cross and was then raised from the dead, faced three broad groups of opponents. Pagan Grks and Romans, just as do pagans in our own time, regard the cross as foolishness to be laughed out of court. Jewish Jews felt the same way, and adamantly defended the law of Moses as the proof of God's love to the chosen people. It was unthinkable that the Messiah of God would come breaking the Law of God, about the sabbath as well as the supremacy of the law. Then there was the 3d group, the Jewish Xns, who had eye-witness knowl of Xr which Paul himself lacked, and who had heard J say that he came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. Paul had not heard Jesus preach, and he refused to allow the Jerusalem disciples to teach him. What he knew of the gospel he received by direct revelation from God. His theology and his doctrine of salvation was not a continuity from the preaching of J. It arose from the Cross and the empty tomb. Paul taught not new ideas, but a new way of perceiving an event. To Paul the event meant the end of the Law. As he wrote to the Chs, when relig is oversimplified into a moral code, the temptation becomes one of replacing God with a good work. If we can do the will of God ourselves, then we are likely to ignore God's action in the face of our inability to do for ourselves. When human beings decide the "good" is what God wants done, we no longer need faith, or God either. But God is the great disturber who shakes the pews when we look upon ourselves as the good guys, better than those bums who do not sit in a pew, or when we think we are so good we no longer need salvation and forgiveness. Paul knew to the marrow of his bones that those who have faith have moved into a new age, into a new testament, where the law is the power of sin (ICor15) which has been overcome. It was the guide by which we knew sin, but in the newness of life that is ours in faith it is no longer effective. To demand of non-Jewish converts to Xty that they abide by rules which have lost their meaning is to set at naught the redeeming act of J in giving his life a ransom for many. So as Luke reported it in Acts, there was a conference in Jerusalem which Paul and Barnabas attended. The date was 48 a.d. if the historians are correct, but Paul's own version knows nothing of a Jerusalem council, or of a liberal attitude expressed by Peter. In Acts it was Peter who took the lead in opening the Church to all whose hearts had been cleansed by faith, to all who are saved by the grace of the Lord J. Some things were forbidden to them, but the gentiles were welcomed into the Xn family..God moves in mysterious ways, to grant forgiveness while we were yet sinners, when we need forgiveness. It was an open door to the explosive pwr of God, bringing life to pagans, giving it freely, as a gift, and it is for all men and women everywhere. Let the congregation say Amen, and Hallelujah.

10-6-91. Macedonia. Last week I ^{Went to} attended a memorial service for a departed friend who often attended these Sunday morning sessions. I sat in a beautiful chapel built over a lake in which Canada geese and green-headed ducks swam and honked, and I listened to the reassuring music of a string quartet from the local symphony orchestra. Before the service began I read from the book I took with me, a volume of sermons by Frederick Buechner. It was about God's attempts to communicate with people of earth. If God really exists, Buechner asked, why in heaven's name does he not prove he exists instead of leaving us here in our terrible uncertainty? Why does God not reshape the Milky Way so that it spells out a message in the night sky, saying I really exist; or perhaps God is. Buechner speculated upon the probable results. There might be tears of regret, he said; many people might think that if they had only known it before they would have lived different lives. Preachers and theologians would be astonished, Buechner said, because they had talked so long about God that God had lost all reality for them and had become just a metaphysical speculation. Several years might go by, with the divine message blazing away in the heavens, so that it lost its effect, so that God would need to vary the wording. Perhaps it would be in different colors, or it would be in German, or in Chinese ideographs, or backed by a choir of angel voices. Maybe, in time, a child would ask of its father, So what if God exists? What difference does THAT make? At that moment, Buechner imagined, the message would disappear, the music would fade away, the milky way would once again appear as a mist of tiny suns. We want to be certain, don't we, before we take the first tiny cautious step of faith. And that is a contradiction. Could it be that God does speak to us each day, sending a signal that we are incomplete, that we are empty and unfulfilled, and that this sense of loneliness is God's voice in a world that has explained God away? Could it be, Frederick Buechner asked, that God's most clear word to us is his silence and his absence, so that we know his presence best when we miss him most? We hear God speak at the extremities of life also, he said. We hear the word of God in internatl crises that threaten all living things with extinction, and we hear God in the death of people we love, and in the failures and betrayals and ~~in~~ all that happens to endanger our inner peace. So at memorial services for good people whom God has called home, and in the music of a string quartet asking us what is the true and the beautiful, and in a small lake where ducks and geese call to each other, we know that the faithful heart has its reasons that the skeptical reason can never comprehend. May we all hear the call of God to us as a people, in wars and rumors of wars, and as individuals, in the sunset and the blowing gale, in the silence and the longing we know deep inside, and also in the still small voice of comfort and strength which is tuned to our wavelength when we need to hear it most. Today we have a lesson about a call from God and a most significant result which came from it, text Acts 16. This fall the assigned Bible study invites us to retrace the steps by which Paul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle, agent of God to the non-Jewish people of the ancient world, and how the gospel of God in Xr which offers forgiveness and salvation moved from the ancient city of Jerusalem to Rome the capital of the world. Along the way we have been asked to study the meaning of conversion from one course in life to another, and the place and nature of preaching in the Xn tradition, and the newness of the new life in Xr. In all of these matters there are lessons which speak to the ancient world in the days of the Caesars, and to the modern world. Today we come to a major fork in the road of Xn Church history, one that is of continuing significance to every aspect of world politics. Along with it is the story of two women who play leading roles in the drama. Acts 16:6-24. After the controversy over the admission of gentiles into the Xn felwshp without their meeting Jewish conditions, many of us would have been ready for a vacation. Not Paul. He knew, as many of us do not, how short is the time in which we may act; in two of his ltrs Paul urged his readers to redeem the time, in the modern translat/make the most of the time. In John's gospel we hear J saying, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. So Paul, restless, impatient with delays, eager to proclaim the new life which is ours, returned to his calling. It is what the scholars call the 2d missionary journey, although it is likely that the author of the Acts did not intend that Paul's travels be so divided. This time his companion was Silas, and very soon also Timothy. Barnabas, that good man who brought Paul into the Antioch church, separated from Paul for reasons that are nowhere made clear; probably because Barnabas could not accept Paul's liberal abandonmt of the law of Judaism. Silas, like Barnabas, was a Hebrew, and ~~he~~ had been a member of the Jerusalem church and was one of the delegates sent to Antioch after the conference in Jerusalem. The two missionaries lost no time; they crossed the rugged mountains that ring AsMin//to visit the small groups of converts Paul had left after his first visit to the Grk provinces of the interior. After Timothy joined them, none of their plans went according to plan. Where they intended to go is not at all clear. They zigged and they zagged across that large country, as the account reads, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. We do not know what signal informed them that they should not. What is clear is that the spirit of God was closing doors they thought they ought to enter. The important point to all the apparently pointlessness is not geographical; it is theological. Three separate statemts repeat the assertion that where Paul

went was not for him to decide. The Holy Spirit stopped him from preaching in Asia, the Spirit of Jesus closed the door into Bithynia, and a night vision directed him to Macedonia, to Europe. And before we consider what that might mean, please note that vv 6-7 Lk does not distinguish between the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus. In v.10 it was God who called them to preach on the western side of the Hellespont. The theological lesson in this is a most important one. The belief that God guides us when we make decisions is based upon the assurance that God has a plan that in the long run will be realized. That is what theologians call Providence. It is not fatalism; that holds that we are but puppets on God's string and everything is planned and arranged long in advance. We have no choices to make. Nor is it accidentalism; that says that nothing is planned beforehand, and the whole universe as well as the routines of our lives are coincidences and the result of mindless chance. Providence teaches that there is a grand strategy but within it there is room for personal freedom and choice and response. Our life-careers, for instance, are within the providence of God; whether the country survives or falls victim to greed and dishonesty is in the hands of God. He's got the whole world in his hands, the song goes, but I can decide what I have for breakfast tomorrow morning. Providence, commentator Theodore Ferris has written, is flexible enough to great large measures of freedom; it is forceful enough to obviate the possibility of ultimate failure; and its purpose is to preserve the quality and the richness of life and not just its duration. Doors close in our faces, but providence tugs at us: there is more to come, this is not the end, as Yogi said it ain't over til it's over. Paul and Silas attempted to go into Bithynia but the spirit of Jesus did not permit them, so they went down to Troas, vv7,8. When I was half your age every preacher worth his divinity degree had a sermon on that text. Wanting Bithynia and getting Troas, was the title, and it was about taking second best and then learning that it was the best there is. God never leads a person into a place where all the doors are shut; if God leads us to Troas there must be something important to do here. Out of what appears failure, God creates a whole new mission. In the prophet Isaiah we read: Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, This is the way; walk in it." It is a voice of peace and certainty. Antonio Stradivari wanted more than anything else to be a concert violinist, but his fingers would not cooperate with his dream. A friend named Amati, a maker of violins/told him to Cheer up, there are many ways of making music. What matters is the song in the heart. We all know what Stradivari did when he took what he scorned as second best. Dozens of stories tell the same thing. The teacher G. Campbell Morgan wrote that it is better to go to Troas with God than anywhere else without him. So Paul and Silas went to Troas, very near the site of Homer's Troy, and they looked about them. What Paul saw was a vision with a call. At night he saw a man of Macedonia, which is 60 miles across the northern end of the Aegean Sea, and it was in Europe. An old hymn that made the church rafters shake sang it out--we have heard the Macedonian call today, Send the light, send the light, the blessed gospel light. Come over to Macedonia and help us, Paul heard the man say. Immediately he knew it to be the will of God for him. He knew it to be the call that had been waiting for him since that blinding light on that Damascus road, since his unique training in Grk schools and in the Hebrew hope. There was a divine plan for Paul, and there is also one for each of us. We are empty, incomplete, unfulfilled, lonely and ill at ease, until we find it and follow it, as Frederick Buechner said. Immediately, v.10, WE sought to go. This is the beginning of the We passages in the Acts, which the scholars tell me mean that Luke the author of Acts has now joined the party and is an eyewitness. God had called, and men of faith responded to the call. And see what happened when they did. Two women move to the front of the stage, and what they have to teach us is important. Paul and his group went to Philippi, the main city of the district, and the place where Paul establ his most trouble-free church; read the ltr he wrote them to understand how he loved them, and how they responded to his most poetic theological hymn on the meaning of the incarnation. It began with a business-woman we know as Lydia. It must be said that way, because it is not clear whether Lydia is her name or her hometown; Thyatira was a town in Lydia, a province in AsMin. She was a dealer in dyestuffs, and she was a worshipper of God. She met with the prayer group of women on the riverbank, and there Paul met her. God made the first move: v.14, the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said. Without the leadership of the spirit the witness is in vain. We must make it, and we must not be discouraged, or feel threatened, when it is rejected. But when the spirit is presence, then does a miracle happen. Lydia was a gracious woman, who invited the missionary group into her home, and made it the center of the Philippi church. The other woman also played a large part. As they went about the city a slave girl followed them. She had some madness in her, so that her owners used her for profit from superstitious people now do with New Age materials--tarot cards and ouija boards and crystals to end stress and tension. She was a soothsayer, and she made a profit. Paul ordered out the spirit that dominated her, and she lost her value. Her owners attacked Paul and his group, and beat them, and the officials threw them into prison. It is not the msg from God that we want to hear, but better opposition than apathy and neglect. Paul took what was offered and turned it into a triumph for the faith. That is the meaning of joy, which shall be ours in faith in the Lord.

70 yrs old

10-13-91. Courage to Choose. Nearly a century ago, in 1898, the Russian author Leo Tolstoy wrote an essay on the meaning of art. In it he condemned most of what was being written and performed at the end of last century, the impressionism of the artists, the deliberate incomprehensibility of the poets, the dissonances and counter rhythms of the composers. Art should serve a moral purpose, he wrote. At its simplest, art is the communication of feeling from one person to another. One of its prerequisites is sincerity, Tolstoy said, which is always present in folk art, and is nearly always absent from upper-class art. What is to be communicated is a definition of the highest good at which society aims, and this, Tolstoy wrote, is the religious perception of the given time and society. "If it appears to us that in our society there is no religious perception, he said, this is not because there really is none, but only because we do not want to see it." And the reason we do not choose to see it, he said, "is because it exposes the fact that our life is inconsistent with that religious perception." If humanity progresses it is religion which is the guide and signpost. "All history shows, and I quote Tolstoy, that the progress of humanity is accomplished not otherwise than under the guidance of religion." When we decide that a work is real art, we must then, according to whether it transmits the feelings flowing from love to God and man, or merely the simple feelings uniting all men, assign it a place in the ranks of religious art or in those of universal art." Thus Count Leo Tolstoy expressed his philosophy of what is the beautiful, and what is art. Architecture and sculpture, poetry and prose, painting and drama, and music, must possess a moral purpose. ~~When~~ Artists at the time fumed and complained, ^{but} since the publication of Tolstoy's What is Art?, people have been willing to debate the matter. The contemporary composer John Cage said that music is edifying because from time to time it sets the soul in operation. Take a music bath once or twice a week, Oliver Wendell Holmes the elder said; it is to the soul what a water-bath is to the body. Another contemporary composer, Ned Rorem, wrote that the sound of music, as opposed to rustling leaves or words of love, is sensual only secondarily. "First it must make sense." And Igor Stravinsky in his autobiography said that music is the sole domain in which man realizes the present. "Music is the universal language; it is an emotional assault upon the intellect; it conveys feelings from grief and gloom to joy and exultation, and it is the shout of defiance from the physically weak to the spiritually weak. And it is also a way of worship, of praising God, and of pouring forth a full heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art, to use the poet Shelley's words? Like a Poet hidden in the light of thought, singing hymns unbidden till the world is wrought to sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not." Hymn-singing when all around is pain and the night is dark and ominous // is art, because it is a religious perception. What appears hopelessness and defeat is in fact the spark that lights life with meaning and richness of soul. That is the lesson we have before us today, text Acts 16. With this lesson we are at the midpoint of a 3-month study of the missionary work of St. Paul, entitled From the Damascus Road to Rome. Texts are from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, which some have called the 5th gospel. It was not easy being Xn in the first generation of believers. In one of his ltrs Paul revealed the scars upon his body. Five times he was scourged with 39 lashes, 3 times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, three times shipwrecked; in danger from robbers, from my own people, from Gentiles, in toil and hardship, in hunger and thirst, in cold and exposure. But he added, to live is Xr, to die is gain, for he knew the unsearchable riches of Xr, which he was called and sent to preach. In the scene we have before us, all was dark, the mission terminated, the missionaries thrown into jail after being beaten with metal rods. It may have been that experience that taught Paul a valuable lesson; do not be overcome by evil, he told the Roman Xns, but overcome evil with good. Most of us do not get that opportunity, because our goodness is so pale and shy that we present no threat to evil. But Paul spoke truth to power, and taught salvation by the limitless grace of God, and preached the good news of God incarnate, God with us, God wearing our boots and walking in our paths. So he lived with danger, and he suffered physical attack. And in today's episode we have an example of the power of faith to overcome the fiery darts of the evil one. Let us return to Philippi, the main city in that region of Macedonia, in Europe, where Paul and Silas, with Timothy, won the first Xn convert west of Asia Minor. It was a woman named Lydia, a merchant who dealt in textile dyestuffs. Part of today's text overlaps what we read last week. Acts 16: 19-34. In the early days in Philippi things were going well. The missionaries went to the synagogue where they met and converted a business woman. But then, things went badly. A slave girl who earned money for her owners followed Paul and the group through the town, crying out, these men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation. It annoyed Paul, first because the words meant that the missionaries were Jews, and also because it gave any who heard it the idea that they were also in business to take money from the superstitious who believe whatever is the fad, however arcane. So he exorcised the demon who controlled the girl, so that she was in her right mind. Instead of giving thanks, the girl's owners saw only the end of their income. They seized Paul and Silas and brought suit against them before the city judges. When the right meets might there is always friction. With no chance to defend himself, no testimony, and no witness other than the outraged owners of the girl, they were lynched by a riotous mob with the

support and approval of the defenders of that Roman law which was the pride and boast of the Empire. They were not the first who would find the sheriff and the chief of police and the sworn protectors of justice acting in defiance of law and due process and innocent until proven, and they would not be the last. Where the weakest person in town cannot get a hearing in a court, when brutality prevails, then there are brutes and not human beings in control. By official order the missionaries were beaten with rods. These are the means of corporal punishment in ancient Rome. They are bound into a bundle, with an axe-head bound with them, symbols of authority to beat and to execute. It is called a fasces, and it was the insignia of the fascists in this present century. To be beaten with those rods left the back a bloody mass of offended tissue, sometimes bones broken, sometimes an injured kidney or spleen. Then the wounded men were put in prison, the jailer responsible for them. To be safe he chained their feet into stocks of wood. Paul and Silas must have asked themselves why they were there, why they were hurting, and where was God when we need Him? God had called them to Macedonia to preach, not to be beaten and imprisoned. But the forces of evil defeat themselves when they lock up Xns. From a Bedford jail John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress, the greatest and most influential allegory in English; from a Birmingham Jail Martin Luther King Jr wrote a ltr to the Xn clergy of the country; from the prison in Philippi Paul and Silas prayed and sang. When the enemy of the soul resorts to obscenities and to violence it means he has lost the argument. Some yrs later Paul wrote to the members of the church at Philippi: I want you to know, brothers, that what happened to me has served to advance the gospel. That is the epitaph to the effect of evil and injustice. In prison they prayed. They did not question God's purposes, they did not blame somebody, or in hate declare war upon society. They prayed. It was an act of faith, as prayer always is. It was also worship, and praise. When all is taken from us, when our bodies cry out in pain, when what is unfair becomes the rule, then is the time to fall down and worship. When the world loses meaning, then learn of God. In your midnights of the soul, talk to God. God is still in control; we are never out of his sight. Three miracles happened in that jail. One was the way a strong faith in Jesus the Xr of God enabled those men to sing hymns. It was not a song of vengeance; it was a song of contentment. The prisoners were listening to them, no doubt in amazement at their spirit. Art, Leo Tolstoy said, is a means of communicating feelings from one person to another. Those hymns, perhaps badly out of tune, not in harmony; sung it may be in Hebrew, for they were probably Psalms, said something those prisoners had never before heard. In pain, in chains, and in jail, they sang praises to God. The most meaningful songs are born in the midst of tragedy and sorrow, and come from sufferings and disappointments. I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free, his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me. Those are the words of a popular spiritual. They take on real meaning, however, when the happiness and the freedom are from within a soul full of the love of God, and are invisible to the unbelieving eye. The slave in coffles, the heart-broken mother, the grieving family, can sing because joy and freedom are of God and not of a miserable condition. Much of the church music we hear lacks depth and devotion, in part because the performers ^{do not feel} some of them prefer--in part because it has no soul/which grows only in the soil of adversity. Arthur Moore said, We sing a song at midnight not because of the darkness but because we are sure the morning will appear. As they prayed and sang, a great earthquake shook the walls of the prison, opening the doors and breaking the chains binding the prisoners. As a wit said of that miracle, it was a sacred concert so successful that it brought the house down. It was a coincidence, you say; ah, but it was also a miracle that it happened when it did. The jailer drew his sword, to kill himself, thinking his prisoners had escaped. In Acts 12, when an angel led Peter to safety from a prison, Herod ordered the guards killed. But Paul shouted Do not harm yourself! We are all here. The jailer called for lanterns, and knelt before Paul and Silas, to ask them the most important question any person can ask--what must I do to be saved? In the singing, in the earthquake, and in their refusal to escape, he felt the presence of God. He wanted the peace and assurance of these strange men who knew something he wanted to share. When a body of believers lives its faith on the campus, in the town, at work and play, then they need no outreach committee. Every member is a home missionary, showing by the joy and the certainty of their lives that God is real, that they are new creatures, made whole by faith in the cross and the resurrection. What kind of answer would we give to the jailer? What kind of answer would a committee of your church say to him? Love everybody? Try harder? Build a house for the homeless? Live by the Golden Rule? The answer of Paul was simple and direct: v.31, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him, telling him what God had done for all of humankind in the sacrificial death of Jesus, and what God had done in raising him from the dead. In that fact is life and health and peace and joy; songs at midnight come readily to all who know it, and trust it. The 3d miracle was the changed nature of the jailer. He was baptized, and he washed their wounds, he set food before them as guests in his house, and he rejoiced that he believed in God. Faith is the key to the sense of God's presence which we all yearn for. Faith is belief and trust in childlike simplicity, in the goodness and mercy of God. All things are possible; only believe. May we give thanks for so great a salvation.

10-20-91. Athens. It should come as no surprise to anyone that a perennial conflict in this life is the generation gap between parents and children. Mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, have their disagreements and their fallings out. Parents owe their children roots, so they will know who they are, and what their traditions; children sprout wings and fly the coop, for it is a part of life to seek the risks of independence.. The Xn Church is the parent of the university, and the skirmishing and battling between them is nearly as old as is the establishment of the guilds of teachers and learners. Early in the Xn era, the chief centers of learning was the monasteries, set like islands in a sea of ignorance and barbarism, as a historian of the medieval world put it. They copied the manuscripts and preserved the letters and the culture of the ancients, to save it from extinction, at a time when no other force worked to that end. Thus, when the amount of materials available for learning became so great that it could be mastered only by full-time effort, the universities came into being. They were daughters of the monastics and of the cathedral schools, and they offered instruction in the texts which contained the spirit of liberal education, the mental equipment of the free human being. As the universities debated and dissected the contents of the theological systems of the time, they bumped into complaints from the clergy that their skepticism produced scandal and heresy in every lecture hall and in every public square. Philosophy collided with theology, and the battle has raged ever since. Forty yrs ago Bernard Loomer wrote an essay in which he expressed the paradox of the warfare between church and university: "We shall not have better universities until we have better theology," he said, "and we shall not have better theology until we have better universities...we shall not have better universities until we have better churches, and we shall not have better churches until we have better universities." It sounds like double-talk, or newspeak, to put it like that, and yet the campus and church quarrel, which is one between mother and daughter, is an outgrowth of the necessity of sustaining a learning community which is in turn sustained by the church's commitment to the life of mind and the spirit of religious integrity. The faith and learning issue is an old one, and a continuing one. It asks, how can we recover for our schools the sense of learning as praise of God without limiting or censoring scientific research, or the uses of modern inventions that are machines for gazing into the darkness and silence of deep space, or into the beautiful order that is revealed in the microscopic life of the very small? How are we to restore religious and spiritual character to our universities without harming the free inquiry which is hallmark and essential nature of their existence? To impose a dogmatic creed upon the university is to distort the freedom of soul and of choice which is written into the human spirit at the creation. And, on the other extreme, to cut the roots from which university sprouted, & to sow salt into the wound, is to cut the birth-cord which gave life and breath to the school. And when the university reduces the truths of Xn theology to superficial mention here and there of Ethics, and Integrity, and fidelity to pledged vows, it makes joke of what really matters in life. What church needs, what university needs, is understanding and commitment and dedication within the family of parent and child. Secular learning asks more questions than it can answer, and faith without knowledge becomes superstition and a threat to decency and order. Some wit has said that the age of faith became the age of reason, which then became the age of neither. But to meet the needs and to calm the fears of a troubled present, there is need for university to be faithful both to the intellectual disciplines which inform it, and also to the spiritual awareness of a transcendent Divine. 3 cans ago Sir Isaac Newton, who wrote the mathematical formulas for planetary motion, said that the scientist deduces causes from effects, and comes to the very first cause, which certainly is not mechanical. Being mind and spirit, that first cause, to which we give the name of God, is eternal. Any effort of the logician or the astrophysicist to make Him go stand in the corner has only the effect of the absurd. The morning's lesson concerns these matters of faith and reason, and asks us to think on these things, text Acts 17. This fall in these sessions we are taking a tour around the ancient world, following the footsteps of the pioneer missionary who took the gospel of faith and mind into the faculty clubs and the humanities depts of the Grk and Roman world. The travels of St. Paul, and the expansion of the Xn Ch, are the subjects of this series of lessons. It is significant material, for it describes the roots and origins of western civilization as modified and undergirded by the Xn Church. Today we have one of the high points in that story. It is the sermon Paul preached to the intellectuals of Grk learning. It was the first of many subsequent confrontations between Jerusalem and Athens, between a way of life which begins in penitence and humility and faith and moves toward secular affairs from that beginning, and on the other side, of a way of life which begins with what can be proved to the human senses and approaches the intangible things of spirit as wayfarer in a strange land. Let us listen, then, to these familiar words, and let us imagine as we do that we are hearing a sermon preached under a new-planted ash tree, upon a green carpet of crabgrass, polluted lawn, with students listening whose only aim in life is to enter the life of mind. Acts 17: 16-34. The city of Athens remains the goal of all searchers for the good, the true, and the beautiful. This year many who drink at the Castalian spring journeyed to the acropolis to celebrate what many count as the 2500th anniversary of the city.

yr of democracy as a form of govt. Cleisthenes reformed the Athenian constitution, some say in 509 others in 508 b.c., so that this year or next is a major anniversary to the students of Greek origins of world civilization. When Paul went to Athens, 500 yrs after Cleisthenes, she was past her prime but still the home of a great university and the artistic and intellectual capital of the world. The sermon he preached there is the only one he ever preached anywhere that did not result in mob actions and persecutions, and what may be more important, did not lead to the establ of a Xn Ch. We hear of no Ch in Athens until much later. But preach to them he did, and what he said has lessons for us to hear, and to learn. The text passage divides into three portions. First is the nature of the congregation. It was different from any other group Paul ever addressed; it was the dream of every serious preacher ^{who ever} thumped a pulpit. It was a collection of people who lived on lectures, and classes, and the consideration of philosophical matters that are beyond the capacity of many of us. They lived on a diet of debate and speculation and discussion. They were scholars who had read all that ^{was} important to read, and since the first philosopher Thales in 6th cen b.c. they were skeptics who questioned everything. Paul was at a disadvantage before them, for they heard him just as they did every other idea-salesman who visited them. They had an intellectual curiosity which led them to ask Paul to speak to them; I wonder how many university faculties today would invite the leading Xn evangelist to tell them of his faith? or has the cat's curiosity died with the license to grant degrees? Some of them were epicurean and some were Stoic philosophers. These were the two most influential schools of philosophy at the time. There is no time here, nor knowledge, to explain them; ask your preacher to help you, it is Acts 17:18; or I would be glad to suggest a book or two. It is commendable of Paul that he agreed to speak to such a group. Their response is not likely to be violent, but is something much more devastating--the silent scorn of the intellectual snob, self-satisfied, unable to confess a sin or an error in judgment. But Paul was called to preach the good news of what God has done in Xr. He did not evade a dialog, or leave town to avoid it. The second part of the text is Paul's sermon to such a group. It was an attempt to reach an unfamiliar congregation of professors and self-styled sophisticates. The human mind is as essential to relig as it is to physics or mathematics or literature, and can never be omitted from the equations of faith. When the church closes its mind to the world of business, & society, & learning, it may as well close its doors and stop paymt on its mortgage, for when it shuts out intelligence it denies the humanity of its members. Man minus mind is brute, and I quote the 17th Cen French writer Blaise Pascal; man without thought is a stone or a brute, he said, and added, thought constitutes the greatness of man; and again, all our dignity consists in thought. Every community needs a preacher like Paul, to push open the windows to the mind, and one of the important functions of the university is to insist upon the place of intellect in relig faith. So the sermon began with what may be irony--I perceive that in every way you are very religious; the older translat reads superstitious. They were aware of the mystery of life, and of nature, and to those abstractions we can neither see nor hear; love, for example, or talent, or the pleasing appearance of a building. They wanted something to worship, and in their numerous idols and temples they expressed a curiosity for religion. Starting with that fact, the preacher described what they all knew about--an altar inscribed To an Unknown God. At that altar Paul made his appeal to the secular pagan intellectuals of Athens. He told them they were wasting something that was valuable--the capacity for a meaningful faith. They were worshipping gods which were not worthy of their worship, small gods that could be fashioned of stone. We do the same, don't we? substituting our learning for the truth of God, assuming that we know too much to be humble before the enormity of our ignorance, considering a life built upon the rock of faith to be beneath our dignity, the chaff with which the ignorant and the unlettered feed upon. Paul would say, if you are going to put your faith in a telescope, or a test tube, or in a poem; if you are going to be religious, then be relig in a big way, in a God who is worthy of such trust. If you are going to be relig, as we all are, then have faith in the living God, the Creator and sustainer. Do not be satisfied with 2d best, in preacher, or in creed, or in God; do not betray your intelligence by giving allegiance to a man-made shrine, or to your brain that is mortal and limited; give your best to the God who made human hands, and minds, and spirits. That God, Paul told the Athenians, once dwelt in a human form, and that living image of God is the only expression of the Eternal that is worthy of your devotion. Furthermore, there is coming a day when you and I, and all of us, shall be judged by the one who is the living image of the invisible God. Immortal, invisible, God only wise, the hymn-writer sang; the teacher who is made reverent by the beauty of the natural order of things, by the infinity of space, or the rules by which a single cell lives, becomes the person who worships the God in whom we live, and move, and have our being; and in that line Paul was quoting a line from a Grk poet whose work his hearers would recognize. The next line, as even some of your poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring, is again evidence of Paul's thorough learning in the best that people had said and thought in his day. No preacher should begin a ministry who does not know what his congregation knows, and reads. And then, 3d, the result. It was not immediate, but in the long run it was a major achievement. He shook some of those professors into asking for an aptmt in his counselling session. This is true ministry, and real mission, for which give God thanks.

2,500 YEARS: Athenians Mark Democracy's Birth

THE NEW YORK TIMES

ATHENS, Greece

"Poor democracy," said Virginia Tsouderas with a sigh. "Is there any other word that has been so widely misused?"

As a member of the Greek Parliament, she was raising a glass as Athens celebrated what is being called democracy's 2,500th anniversary this past weekend.

Representatives from more than 40 democracies attended celebrations in Athens, the cradle of the concept of democracy. Music and declamations echoed over the hills where Athenians of all classes began to argue as equals and learned to challenge their rulers in ways that no land had seen before.

DECLARING DEMOCRACY TO be robust, expanding and more topical than ever, Constantinos Karamanlis, the Greek president, said that democracy was so laudable that "even totalitarian regimes — people's republics, dictatorships — oppress their people in the name of democracy."

The three days of festivities here that ended Saturday were only the start of a chain of ceremonies, lectures and exhibits planned in many other countries, including the United States, in the next two years.

"Rule by the people" emerged in stages in Athens during the sixth century B.C., but the commemorations focus on the work of Cleisthenes, the Athenian who established the framework for a direct democracy that was to last more than 200 years. He was widely hailed last week as the man who defied his fellow aristocrats and ensured free speech, equality before the law and everyone's right to share power in the as-

sembly of all citizens. Still, women and slaves in ancient Greece were not considered citizens.

Behind the oratorical flourishes here, scholars continue to disagree about the exact moment of Cleisthenes' constitutional reforms. Those who hold to the year 508 B.C. say that the current celebrations have come a year too early. But some of Cleisthenes' followers, members of Parliament and other democratic envoys from around the world seemed unconcerned about such details.

"Beautiful — oh, how very beautiful," said Nancy Ellis, the sister of President Bush and the leader of the United States delegation, as she walked Friday night along the Pnyx, the rocky platform where ancient Athenians used to hold their popular assemblies.

OTHERS SEEMED IMPRESSED by the temples of the Acropolis, glowing nearby in golden floodlights, the rise of a full moon in a cloudless sky and a speech by the speaker of the Greek Parliament on the stone podium where, he recalled, Solon and Pericles had set a new course for Western civilization.

This audience, though, was certainly better behaved than the ancient Athenians, a contemporary citizen said, because the ancient Athenians in full assembly would argue and yell for hours and sometimes days on end. On this Friday night, there was quiet as actors read ancient texts and the documents that sprang from the texts, including the Magna Carta of England, the American Declaration of Independence and France's Declaration of the Rights of Man.

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10-27-91. Baptism of the Spirit. For many years Warren Carr was minister and pastor in the Ch which is located on the campus of this university. In those years he was many things to many people. He was counsellor, interpreter, preacher, and friend whose door was always open and who welcomed every visitor as an opportunity for conversation and the give and take of the Xn evangelist. Among the many kinds of help and inspiration he provided in his ministry, high in the listing must be the books he wrote. One of them is related to the subj of this morning's lesson. Its title is Baptism--conscience and clue for the church. As conscience, baptism is the persistent reminder of what constituted both the nature and the mission of the Xn community. As clue, the rite of baptism serves by virtue of its symbolic quality. The way the gathered community of believers understands and interprets baptism is the key to its understanding and interpretation of the very essence of its faith and its teaching and its life. Warren Carr quoted the English teacher and preacher P.T. Forsyth: baptism is the utterance of the community to which the minister does but lend his voice. Carr added his own word: baptism is an act of worship. It both implies and is associated with the gift of the Spirit. In whatever denomination, the degree to which baptism is pushed aside will indicate the profundity of the worshiping body. Wherever the church family focuses upon the person being baptised, whether it be infant, or child, or adult, rather than exalting what God in Xr has done for that professing individual, then is baptism inconsequential. That is both conscience and clue for the church. This morning we have a text about baptism, both about what it can become, and what it ought to be in our lives. Text Acts 18, 19. Today is the last Sunday in October, which is a very special month in this class. It was at the beginning of Oct, in 1979, that the Reid Staton Bible Class began broadcasting its lessons on this radio station. But the end of the month means that only 4 more sessions remain to us in the present series of lessons. Beginning in Sept we have taken Biblical passages from the Bk of the Acts to study the expansion of the Xn Ch through its missionary St. Paul, from his conversion experience on the Damascus Road all the way to the capital city of Rome. Today, with 2/3 of the course behind us, we have a lesson about that rite which is the persistent reminder, as Warren Carr said, of what constitutes both the nature and the mission of the Church. It asks us to consider baptism as an initiation into the family of believers, and as the re-enactment of the death, burial, ^{resurrection} of our Lord which is the fundamental proclamation of the good news. It also invites us to consider other matters, important matters intended to make us think about our faith and the way we express it in the churches. Acts 18: 24 - 19: 7. After his sermon in Athens Paul may have been discouraged and depressed. He must have been weary and dismayed because of the beatings and jailings and violence that he met, and disappointed that the university people in the city of learning had not responded to his preaching. He left Athens and went to Corinth, as we read at the beginning of Acts 18. There he met Priscilla and Aquila, tentmakers as was Paul himself, so he moved in with them. It was in Corinth that he shook out his garments to symbolize his decision to spend no more time preaching to Jews; from now on I will go to the Gentiles, he said v. 6. He did not keep his threat, for in Corinth and in Ephesus on the eastern shore of the Aegean sea, he continued to debate with Jews the meaning of their law and their prophets, and to win converts among them who accepted Jesus the crucified as the promised Messiah of God. To Ephesus with Paul came his Corinthian friends Priscilla and Aquila, who were deacons/who took responsibility for the church in the city. They were there when a gifted and attractive young man named Apollos arrived. We read of this man here, and also at the beginning of 1 Cor, and in a brief mention in Paul's ltr to Titus. He is important in himself, but also in what he represented. He stands as a measuring stick by which we may understand what it means to be Xn. Apollos was almost a Xn, but not quite. We read that he had many of the requirements as well as many traits and abilities the Ch has always needed and often cherished. Apollos was a native of Alexandria, in Egypt, where there was one of the great universities and the greatest library in the ancient world. There was also the most influential Jewish teacher and writer of his generation, a man named Philo Judeus. Many scholars have without success attempted to prove that Apollos was a pupil of that Philo. Whatever may be the truth, and he could in fact have heard Philo and have read in that celebrated library, he was/as Lk tells us/an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. As he spoke and taught he revealed his proficiency in the oratorical flourishes that dominated Grk rhetoric of his time, and he was thoroughly familiar with the Hebrew Bible. He had been in addition instructed in the way of the Lord; that is, he knew something about Xn beliefs and about the Xn way of life. He was fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus. Every bit of this learning and this doing is necessary underpinning for an understanding and an acceptance of the Xr-event. It requires a knowledge of the covenant history of the chosen people; it requires a knowledge of the story of the Exodus, and of the first Passover when the lamb was slain and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts as a sign to the angel of death. From that intervention of God into history, to liberate an oppressed people, and to require the death of an innocent as the way of forgiving the sin of the guilty, Xns have a key to the communion supper in the upper room. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for

the redemption of many. Apollos knew and understood that fact. What he lacked was an acceptance of baptism with the meaning of that new covenant. He knew only the baptism of John the baptizer. You may read about him in Mk 1, in Matt 3 and in Lk 3. He was the forerunner. He preached repentance, and he baptized for the forgiveness of sin. It was a washing in water which symbolized a moral reform and improvement. That is an action no one should deprecate, but it is not Xn. The baptism of Jesus is a symbolic re-enactment of the death and burial and resurrection which our Lord suffered in our name. The proof-texts seem clear enough. Rom 6: do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Xr J were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Xr was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Col 2: you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him thru faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened, made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Here is the conscience and clue for the church, Warren Carr would remind us. Congregations which neglect, and forget, or are ashamed of, the theological symbolism of baptism, ~~they~~ betray/by that lack of concern/their misunderstanding of what constituted the nature and the mission of the Ch. Moral improvement is a worthy goal, but it is the consequence of, and not the substance of, the Xn confession. The method of baptism is not primary either. Any method which suggests and symbolizes death and burial and coming alive again will do. What is needed is the profession of faith in the new life/which Xr gave us/in the new covenant in his death and resurrection. The cross stands atop the spires of excellence we call the church/because it is the cross which is at the center of the Xn proclamation. 30 yrs ago Neville Clark, a Baptist minister in Rochester, England, published an essay on the theology of baptism. The ritual of initiation calls believers to share in Xr's vocation, to tread his way, to shoulder his cross, to know his sufferings, Clark wrote. Only after the resurrection is Xn baptism a reality; for it finds its meaning in the self-offering of the Svt-Son. Jesus also accepted the baptism of John in the Jordan, and from the heavens the spirit of God descended upon him like a dove. In that scene is the essential difference between the baptism of John to repentance, and the baptism of Jesus to receive the holy spirit. It would be an absurdity to say that Jesus was baptised into his own name. But after the triumph of the resurrection there could be, there MUST be, baptism in the name of the one who died, was buried, and arose again. The Xr who has come is the same as the Xr who will come, so that the forgiven sinner is at the same time justified and wrong-doer, the church is the broken body under the cross, the spirit is the seal and guarantee of our inheritance until we actually possess it in the life that is to be. Eph 1:14. So as we hold to the faith in the resurrection we reenact it until it becomes a reality to us. Baptism is a sacrament of the gospel, not of our experience of it; it is a picture of God's power to give life to those who are perishing. If the Ch belittles, or takes as routine//so significant a reminder, then do we forget the eternal because we are seduced by the temporal. Now see what happened when Apollos because to speak in the synagog. Priscilla and Aquila knew from what he said what was lacking in his relig. So a woman member of the Ch took him and expounded to him, a male preacher, the way of God more accurately. There is high drama in that line, v.26, and there is much for a male-dominated clergy and priesthood to chew upon. How many are there among us ~~who~~ ~~thinks~~ who think woman's place is in the pew, or pumping the pedals of the piano, or perhaps even being sainted,, but who should not instruct the men of the cloth the way of God more accurately? So Apollos knew the resurrection baptism. And at Ephesus there was a similar incident, which Luke put with the Apollos story so the reader would not miss the point. Again there were those who knew the baptism of repentance but not the baptism of the holy spirit which gives newness of life. That baptism of John the baptizer has disappeared in our world, but what it stood for still remains. To be baptized into John meant going thru life doing good, being sorry for one's sin, and that is a positive thing. We need more people to give of their means to the United Way, and to Crisis Control, and to the Salvation Army shelter for the homeless. But to be baptized into Jesus means to walk in a new life already attained, in which the believer expresses in good works her gratitude and thanksgiving to God for mercy and forgiveness in the cross and in the empty tomb. In the spirit there is the certainty of that which in repentance and morality remains a promise of things to come. The great battleground of the Xn is not the effort to attain moral perfection; it is instead the secret of life everlasting, life abundantly, which means the fruits of the spirit--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. In 1829 the Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson wrote a poem about baptism, which has been set to music and is a hymn of the Ch. Come holy spirit, dove divine, on these baptismal waters shine, and teach our hearts, in highest strain, to praise the Lamb for sinners slain. We sink beneath the water's face, and thank thee for thy saving grace; we die to sin and seek a grave with thee beneath the yielding wave. And as we rise with thee to live, O let the holy spirit give the sealing unction from above, the joy of life, the fire of love.

11-3-91. Farewell. There are not many of us who enjoy having to bid farewell to those who have come to know and to love. Parting is such sweet sorrow, William Shakespeare wrote, ^{we} put into the mouth of a character who thought it likely that the next day would see the return of his beloved ~~very soon~~; his next words were, I shall say goodnight until tomorrow, or the parting would not be sweet. Every parting gives a foretaste of death, the German philosopher Schopenhauer said, and the French poet Edmond Haraucourt wrote, a century ago this year, //that to leave is to die a little; one leaves behind a little of oneself every time there is a separation. But to many readers it was Massachusetts poet Emily Dickinson who said it best. It is only in this present century that the complete work of that gifted woman has been made available in print. She lived in Amherst where she scribbled brief notes, she called them here letters to the world, and threw them in disorder into a trunk. When that treasure was unveiled she was found to be one of the greatest of American poets, one who was in the words of commentator Herschel Parker acutely responsive to the enduring questions of the nature and meaning of human consciousness, who knew the riddling tensions produced by the terrible slipperiness of reality. She understood what at times we all understand, Prof. Parker wrote, that the 'sweetness of life' consists in our knowing 'that it will never come again,' and that this same awareness is the source of the bitterness of life. Emily Dickinson, he said, lived a life of ecstatic and agonized instants; her most vital poems record those 'nows' made 'forever'. And that, dearly beloved, is as brief and as complete a definition of enduring art that we may ever know. Because Emily Dickinson understood the brevity of life's sweetness & ecstasy she wrote about it with a yearning and a poignancy that her readers have admired. Hear what she wrote about farewells. My life closed twice before its close; it yet remains to see if Immortality unveil a third event to me, so huge, so hopeless to conceive, as these that twice befell. Parting is all we know of heaven, and all we need of hell. // It is the fact that to be human is to be limited // that is our subject for today; that in every human relationship whether good or ill there is a beginning and an end, // and that wisdom whispers in our ear in the moment of bliss // to enjoy to the full against the moment of sadness, to add a sigh to every smile and to underline every joy with a note of sorrow. Text Acts 20. Today we begin the final month in a fall series of studies on the missionary career of St. Paul the apostle (which means one who is sent) to the Gentiles. Those fifteen years from the Damascus road, which may be dated about a.d. 35, mark the pivotal expansion in the revelation of God in Xr. Led by the spirit Paul and his companions travelled over much of the eastern Mediterranean provinces of the world empire which was Rome. From Antioch in Syria to Antioch of Pisidia they went, preaching first to the Jewish communities they found in Anatolia and in the Grk peninsula, and then to other people who knew nothing of Jewish faith and practice ^{and} the promise of a Messiah who would come to redeem all the world's people from their sin. How do you describe sin to people who do not know the meaning of the word, and who do not believe that any human action is of itself evil? It is the same problem the missionary to an American city in 1991 has to face. It is therefore instructive to read of Paul's sermons and work among the pleasure-seekers and pornographers (the word itself is Grk, which should surprise no one) and worshippers at the shrines of Mammon. Now today we have another high-point in the narrative. Chap 20 of Acts tells of rapid journeys from Ephesus across to Macedonia and southward into Greece, and soon thereafter of a return thru Macedonia to Asia Minor, where Paul began a trip to Jerusalem to deliver the money gifts from the gentile Xns to their Jewish brothers and sisters who were there. Paul wanted it to be assistance to the suffering ones, but he had a wider purpose. Contributions from his converts // to the Xns who had been Jews // would be a visible bridge between the two parts of the Xn Way, and would be a sign of the healing of the quarrel between them. He wanted to get to Jerus on the day of Pentecost. Earlier in the bk of the Acts we read of the outpouring of the Holy spirit on the day of Pentecost which came after the Passover which Xr in the supper in the upper room and on the cross on that small skull-shaped hill transformed and fulfilled the promise of forgiveness and life abundant that was symbolized in the lamb of the passover. On the first Xn Pentecost you will remember that the spirit-filled disciples understood everyone in whatever language they spoke. It reversed the division of humankind into tribes and nations based upon languages, told in Gen 11, and it represented the unity of the human race in the Kgd^m of God. While Paul was at Miletus, a 3-day journey from Ephesus, he sent word to the ldrs of the Ephesian church, where he had lived for 3 years and had established a small but strong house church, to come to meet with him. He knew he would never in this life pass that way again, and he wanted to say goodbye to his friends and brothers & sisters in the faith. With that background, let us hear the words of his farewell to them. Acts 20: 17*38. First we must note briefly the problems which arise from Lk's words in this passage. He was an eye-witness; from v.5 we have the 2d of the we-sections of Acts. The scholars tell me that means that Lk, the author of Acts, was present. But he has described a Ch organizat which many think much ahead of the fact. Vv 17 & 28 are taken as proof that from Paul's time, from the beginning of the Grk Chs, there were officials, perhaps even ordained by Paul, with titles that became common much later. In one place they are presbyters, elders, and the root from which the presbyterian form of Ch govt sprouted; in the other they are episkopoi,

two Grk words meaning overseers--epi, over; skopein, to look--and the root from which the episcopalian form of Ch govt grew. In northern Europe, thru a process of mispronunciations, it became bishop. In the older translat the word is Overseers; in the newer it becomes Guardians. It would calm many an ancient dividing line in the Ch if we knew better what Paul referred to in these lines. But as the historians of the early Ch put it, the writer of the passage regards inspiration as giving function, not office as conferring inspiration. They were overseers/guardians because they had the Holy Spirit, they did not have the Holy Spirit because they were episkopoi. But problems aside, there are rich nuggets of meaning here which we must emphasize, and study. This is one of the most moving of scenes in all the N.T. because it is a parting, and in this world it was forever. This in itself is enough to make it memorable. It marked the passing of the colors from the pioneer to those who must follow after. One of the fundamental obligations of ldrshp is the preparation and training for the succession. It is this which makes frightening the apparent chaos & confusion in the education of the young in our day. Recently I spoke to an acquaintance who has the job of hiring professionals for a major employer in this region. He said it is unbelievable to read application forms from people who have college and professional school training, who cannot read and write well enough to complete the applications. What will become of us in yrs to come when in business and in the professions there are people who do not know the classic texts of the liberal arts, in which one meets and contends with the ideas of truth, and beauty, and justice, & the slipperiness of reality? It is sweet to see a new generation taking control, but it is sad to see the older generation stepping aside to give them room. Paul first reminded the elders of what he had done among them. I served the Lord with humility and with tears and with trials. It is not an easy road to travel when one has heard the call into the preaching ministry. Rejection comes with the territory, and as J told his disciples, I send you out as sheep among wolves; shake off the dust from your feet when your hearers reject your message. Tears and trials may be taken as example and norm for ministry, and the proper mood for ministers is humility, the opposite of the arrogant and dominating relig personality. Paul then turned to the content of his preaching in Ephesus. It did not live on the periphery, nor did it ignore the life-and-death options which the preacher must constantly set before his hearers. It was witness to the saving power of God in Paul's life, which can be in every person's life by faith in God's infinite grace and mercy. V.20, I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable. Someone must have accused Paul of keeping secret the whole of gospel truth, for in vv.27,31, he repeated the declaration. I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God; for 3 yrs I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. Are ministers and missionaries in our day weeping over the stubborn rebellion of people in this world to trust God and in faith believe the good news of what God has done in Xr? Paul was on his way to his death--and are not all of us on that same road? There was not time for what does not matter. Paul was concerned with the judgment to come, with the goal and end of life in this age, not with its wealth or its setting or its length. Whoever would save his life will lose it, Jesus said; whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? he asked. To which Paul added, I did not covet any person's gold or silver or fine clothing; my hands ministered to my necessities. I do not account my life as precious to me, if only I may finish the course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. This is evidence of Paul's dedication to the salvation narrative which is the core and theme of the Bible. To sinners, life is the most precious possession; wellness is all that matters. But to those who live in faith, life is the vitality which is to be expended in service to others. In this Paul is the model and example for all churches and their members and their leaders. The gospel was his motive and his message. Only twice does Lk use the noun gospel, meaning the good news. But over and over in NT we read the phrase, preach the gospel. Without preaching there is no gospel and no salvation story; without gospel there can be no preaching and no church. But now Paul had come to the time of parting. v.25, I know that all you among whom I have gone about preaching the kgdm will see my face no more. He can live with uncertainty because he is in the will of God; he can accept suffering if that is what will happen; he is determined to finish the course. His life means testifying to the gospel of the grace of God, which is synonymous to preaching the kgdm of God. God's grace opens the Kgdm to all who believe, and who trust. So he was innocent of the blood of those who rejected the message; they shall be judged by God if they lose faith. And Paul predicted times of trouble after his departure. v.28, take heed, to feed the flock, for fierce wolves will come upon you from without, and from within the group, from among your own selves, v.30, will arise perverse men, to draw away the disciples. So give of yourselves freely, and keep faith not with popularity, not with riches, not with fine clothing, for these rot and rust and decay; but with that which is eternal. By toiling you must help the weak, remembering the words of J, who said it is more blessed to give than to receive. When he had spoken thus he knelt down and prayed with them all. They wept and embraced him and kissed him, showing unashamed emotion. Then they took him to the ship which would bear him away. Parting is a foretaste of death; it is all we need of hell. But praise be to the Lord, who goes with us, and also stays behind.

11-10-91. Jerusalem. Last month there was an article in the Xn Cen by Norman DePuy. It was about relevance, and the embarrassing abasement of many contemporary churches to the fads and fashions of the society in which ^{they} live. We all want to be relevant, DePuy said; anecdotes about the church adjusting her skirts while the world burns are the mainstay of relig horror stories. To be irrelevant is a death sentence in the minds of many, in the church and outside it/among those who need to justify their relig indifference. The Ch does not meet my needs, we are saying, because it lives in the past and will not adjust to face the realities of the baby-boom generation. DePuy cited a Newsweek cover story published last December about the 40-somethings. They are returning to Ch, the article reported, but on their own terms. No relevance, no commitmt. To quote the Newsweek story, "This is the 1990s, an age of mix 'em, match 'em salad-bar spirituality--Quakerpalians, charismatic Catholics, New Age Jews--where brand loyalty is a doctrine of the past and the customer is king." This generation jumps denominational boundaries with ease, and many a clergyman has been heard to declare that the divisions for which sincere people once fought and died are errors to be ridiculed and then forgotten. Baptists no longer talk about baptism, Presbyterians have forgotten the meaning of independency, Methodists do not have a method, just to mention a few. People, Newsweek said, now shop for a church that is most relevant for their needs; they seek the place with bowling teams and sewing circles and outings for the elderly//and support groups for all manner of divergent and non-conforming people. Nowhere in the article was the ~~AB~~ mention of the catechism's definition of the chief end of human beings--the worship of God and the enjoyment of God forever. Worship is neither implied nor expressed in the relevant church's cafeteria of programs; devotional homilies on the gospel of Romans 5 are rarely if ever heard. All those principles and doctrines about the gift of God of his Son who is in the world reconciling the world to God are de-emphasized //church-growth movements are concerned with everything but theology. They are preoccupied with such matters as friendliness, and sociology, and demographics, and programs. Salvation for the ecology, and for the whales and spotted owls who live in it//get more attention than salvation for sick souls. There is no need to denigrate a concern for God's world or for churches who minister to AIDS patients or provide exercise rooms for couch potatoes, to condemn a bookkeeping system that includes only what may be counted and measured with charts and graphs. If we put into our religion only that which is superficial, we should not be surprised if the result is also superficial. Today we have a text which asks us to think about a commitmt that goes to the marrow of our bones, and which deals with what really matters in this life, Acts 21. Today we enter the final segment of a fall study of St. Paul and the expansion of the Xn Ch into the Graeco-Roman world. Ten wks ago we began with a reading of Paul's dramatic conversion as he travelled along the road to Damascus to root out the heretics who accepted Jesus the Nazarene as God's promised Messiah to the house of Israel. From that turning point the God of the risen Lord called that Saul to be missionary to the gentile peoples whose religions were in the eyes of devout Jews pagan and unclean delusions. Since that beginning, we have folwd Paul on his journeys, we have heard him preach, and we witnessed his effort to win equality before God in a Church that was dominated by converted Jews. They regarded the Xr-event as a branch on the root of Moses and the Law, a fulfillment of the promises of God to Abraham and to the prophets. It was proven by the resurrection but that did not annul the ancient Hebrew practices and rules. Anyone who became Xn must submit first to the Law of Moses; the same God who was incarnate in Xr ordained the Sabbath and prohibited the consumption of meat with the blood in it. Peter and Paul worked out an agreemt, and the Ch could become inter-natl. Now we read from the concluding section of Luke-Acts. It is the climax of the story as Lk understood it, and here I follow the interpretation of Gerhard Krodel in his commentary on Acts. It presents Paul as the suffering witness of Jesus Xr and defender of the gospel in Jerusalem, and Caesarea, and in Rome. Along the way he had to contend with Jewish zealots and Roman officials and storms at sea and the bite of a poisonous serpent. But when Paul at last reached Rome the reader knows that God's cause has triumphed over all the troubles. It has succeeded because of Paul's suffering, in which the prophecy of Jesus at Paul's conversion was made real--9:16, I will show him, Paul, how to suffer for the sake of my name; 14:22, Paul told the disciples that thru many tribulations we must enter the KgdM of God. No bowling teams or salad-bar spirituality in Paul's church; serious, life-or-death commitmt in, serious and meaningful results. Note the parallels in Lk's writings between the passion of Jesus and the sufferings of Paul; it is a reminder that we are called not to an easy-chair but to take up the cross daily. With Paul, as with his Lord J, his face was set to go to Jerusalem even though his friends warned him that danger, perhaps even death, awaited him there, Acts 19:21. There we read also that Paul said, after I have been to Jerusalem, I must see Rome. Rome is the symbol for a universal faith in the way that gives abundant life; the last word in the Acts tells us that Paul preached about the KgdM of God and taught about the Lord J Xr openly and unhindered. Even though Lk lived perhaps another 30 yrs, he added not 1 syllable to what he had written. It said what he wanted to say. Acts 21 thru 28, the final segment and the climax of Lk's two-volume gospel, does not tell of conversions or of the growing missionary endeavor. It is the record of Paul's defense of the gospel against Jews primarily,

(more than a quarter of the entire book.) and secondarily against officials of the Roman empire. But to the author it was of major importance. Measure the space Luke allotted to it. There are six chapters describing Paul's missionary work, but eight chapters given to this concluding portion.//There are 66 vv of defense speeches in comparison with 42 vv of missionary sermons to Jews and gentiles. For Lk therefore, it is clear that Paul in prison, Paul the suffering witness, Paul the defender of the faith, is even more important than Paul the missionary to the world of Grks and Romans. I am not sure what that might mean, or whether it should be taken as the proper balance in our own Xn pilgrimages. You think about it, and if you want to discuss it, I shall be willing and eager. It is also clear, at least in commentator Krodel's opinion, that Paul's defense of the Gospel was directed not to convince Romans that Xns are politically harmless to the rule of that great statesman Nero Caesar, but to the Xn reader who must learn that making the Xn witness will result in false accusations, among them the charge of causing civil unrest. In Acts the Roman govt is not a beast or the Anti-Christ as it would be portrayed in the apocalypse; it is the institution to which Paul appealed for justice when it became clear that the Jewish Sanhedrin was determined to destroy him by any means. Roman justice, though flawed, was better than Jewish justice. To Luke, then, the high point of Paul's career is not his pastoral encouragement, or his missionary journeys, but his witness as the suffering servant of Jesus. Today we read of Paul's experience in Jerusalem, Acts 21: 27-40. Paul's treatment in Jerusalem is filled with ironies. He went to the holy city to deliver a love-offering from his gentile converts to the Jewish Xns. He wanted it to be sign and seal of the unity of the people of God. Instead it resulted in a riot just outside the temple gates, a beating that was intended to kill him, and his arrest and binding in chains by the Roman guard. Again, he went into the temple to assist 4 men, vv 17-26, who wished to be purified, probably to take vows as Nazirites, a strict sect of Jews and a procedure Paul very likely considered unnecessary now that all who believe are purified and have the righteousness that only God can give. But what Paul did in an attempt to allay the fears of his Jewish opponents became the occasion for their attack upon him. Jews from Asia, from Ephesus where Paul had lived for 3 yrs, recognized him, & they had also seen Trophimus the Ephesian with Paul in Jerus. They assumed that Paul had profaned the temple by bringing the gentile into the inner portion of the temple. They shouted to the crowd for help, and they seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and shut the gates behind him. They acted in all sincerity against the man who taught, as they heard it, against the law and against the temple; moreover, he had defiled this holy place. Ironies everywhere in the story. All of us think in terms of us vs. them and we attack those who are different because they are a threat. So they seized and began to beat Paul. Note that Luke does not tell what happened to the collection for the suffering Xns in Jerus; he may have brought it to the temple; he may have used it to pay for the purification of the 4 Nazirites. But Lk is silent about the failure to demonstrate the unity of Jewish and gentile churches, a failure that was one of the great tragedies of the 1st Cen Ch, one we continue to feel effects of. The rejection by Jerus Xns of the collection taken to meet their needs would have marred Lk's basic picture of the unity of the believing people of God. It was a bitter irony that the love-offering that Paul wrote so much about to the Corinthians, and the Galatians, and the Romans, should not only fail to bridge the gap between Jewish and gentile Xns, but should become the cause of his imprisonment and ultimately to his martyrdom. The riot in the temple aroused the Roman guard who lived in the fortress of Antonia. It was on the northwestern corner of the temple compound, and was connected to the courtyard and portico of the temple by a staircase because of the steep hill. Down that staircase came the troops to break up the disturbance. When the zealots saw them coming, they stopped beating Paul. The tribune arrested the victim of the violence, not those who did it. He ordered that Paul be arrested, and bound him in chains. In the uproar he could not interrogate his prisoner, so he ordered that he be taken up to the barracks, protected by Roman swords from the fury of the mob. Paul spoke in Grk to the Roman official, a fact that surprised that gentleman. Do you know Grk? he asked. Aren't you the Egyptian who led a group called Assassins? Josephus the historian of the Jews told of that hero, leader of a team that plotted to murder all Jews who cooperated in any way with the occupying Romans; they carried daggers under their robes and surrounded and stabbed all collaborators. Just a short time earlier the Roman force had done battle with the assassins on the Mt of Olives, and the ldr had managed to escape. Thus a riot in the temple might be the work of that patriotic murdered and his army of God. No, Paul replied, I am not a revolutionary but a citizen of Tarsus, no mean city; I am not an Egyptian but a Jew. Because the Roman officer had guessed wrong about the prisoner, believing him to be on the most-wanted list, Paul's life was spared. He asked permission to address the crowd in his own defense. Standing above them, on the stairs facing the front of the beautiful temple, he waved his hands for silence, and then began to speak to them in Hebrew--which means Aramaic, the language of that region at that time. It was the first of the defense speeches in the concluding segment of Acts, which we shall not read this time. But hear the lessons: God works in mysterious ways, thru pagans and military officials and angry mobs, to do his will; and the call of God is serious, not superficial, and should inspire us all. It is about life in the midst of suffering, and joy bubbling over. They will lay hands upon you and persecute you, J said earlier, in Lk 21; this will be the time for you to bear witness.

11-17-91. Agrippa. A dozen yrs ago a professor ^{who is also} and dean in the Divinity School of Yale University published a provocative and thoughtful book on Paul and his Letters. His name is Leander Keck. His book taught me things I did not know, and so I share with you some of Keck's insight. In a section about Paul's theology he wrote about the pivotal event in the apostle's faith, the cross and the resurrection. His text is the first 11 vv of I Cor 15: Xr died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the 3d day in accordance with the scriptures. That was a fixed tradition which lay at the core of the Xn proclamation, Keck wrote, and it was the foundation stone of Paul's preaching. It means that Paul's experience on the Damascus road expressed a drastic transformation of Jewish Messianic expectations; it means that Xr's death was not understood as tragedy which came to a good man, or a miscarriage of justice--even though it was clearly both--but as an event thru which sin is overcome. It means that the cross and the empty tomb require a re-examination of the ancient scrolls, and a new way of reading the Hebrew Bible. It means that the focus of Paul's theology, and therefore a fundamental of the Xn faith, is not upon Xr's identity as God's Son, or the virgin birth, or the ministry and teaching and ethical instruction; it is instead upon the saving pwr of the cross, upon the outcome of J's birth and ministry, viewed as a death folwd by a resurrection which turned the old world into a new one. To quote Dean Keck, the core of Paul's preaching was J's cross and resurrection as God's way of dealing with sin. To Paul it did not turn away God's wrath, but it dealt directly with the sin which occasioned God's wrath. As Paul wrote in the ltr to the Romans (4:25), he was put to death, or if you prefer the alternative translat, God handed him over, for our transgressions and raised for our justification. And in 5:8 he said it again: God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Xr died for us. Since the new and right relatshp with God results from faith in the resurrection, and since that could not have occurred apart from J's death, Paul understood that J's execution was God's way of creating the new, right relatshp. Jesus looked forward to the coming of the KgdM, Keck wrote; Paul looked back to what had already occurred, out of God's infinite love for sinful humanity. The cross was not simply an incident, but the capstone and epitome of the Xr-event as a whole. Without the obedience unto death, and the pwr of God who raised J from the dead, the parables and the miracles and the ethical insights lose their authority. It is ~~the~~ Paul the apostle and theologian of the pivotal event who guided and instructed by the Holy Spirit of God learned and taught, preached & wrote the meaning of the new covenant in the broken body and the spilled blood of Xr. The gospel as Paul taught it was not a set of dogmas or assertions about God & Xr that a person could agree to without having his or her life changed. The newness of life, and the spiritual rebirth are open to all who will believe, and put trust in the risen Lord, who lives as comforter and teacher in the world, and sits in majesty at the right hand of God in heaven. Today we have another of Paul's sermons as Lk recorded it, text Acts 26. After today only one lesson remains to us of a fall study on Paul and the expansion of the Xn Church. Note how wide is the leap from the text for last wk, from Acts 21 and Paul's arrest in the temple in Jerusalem, to Acts 26 today, and his sermon before the Roman and Jewish political ldrs. The materials in between are worthy of reading and study, and I can hope that all of us will take it as a class assignmt to read on our own that part of Lk's history. In December, should we be granted so much time, we begin a new series of lessons based upon the songs and prayers of the Bible. You have a warm invitation to join us for singing and celebrations during the winter months. But today we have an example of what the older generations called an apology for the faith. The generation before my own often required of all college students a course entitled Apology, or Apologetics, for Xty. It is the original Grk and Latin word, and it does not mean what we say to someone when we bump into them, or step on their toe, or hurt their feelings. Apology is the argument we make to defend a position or a practice which other people consider wrong, or unfounded. Xn Apology, then, is a set of proofs presented to make evident the truth of Xty. We do little enough of it in our day. You may meet a course, or a series of lectures on it in a divinity school or seminary, but for most of my life apologetics has been banished from the pulpit. It sounds dull and forbidding, doesn't it? and besides, it is easier to preach to cradle Ch members who might be driven away if the sermon were about sin and salvation. But Paul delivered apologies, defenses, of God's work in history and among men and women, because it is the stuff of evangelism. So let us listen, and consider, the words of Paul to the political pwr of his day. Acts 26:1-32. It seems clear that Lk intended Paul's sermon before Agrippa to be the climax of his defense. Its literary form is polished and well-constructed, but there are also signs that Paul delivered most, if not all of it, as we have it here. In it we have the 3d ^{act} of Paul's conversion from persecutor to chief advocate of Jesus the Christ, and it differs in interesting ways from the other 2, in Chaps 9 & 22. It is instructive to put the 3 versions side by side to compare them. Here you will note that Ananias, the Xn of Damascus, has disappeared, & it was Xr himself who commissioned Paul directly to preach to the Gentiles. Here the emphasis is not upon Paul's conversion, but upon his call to be missionary; his blindness and healing are also omitted because they were part of the conversion and not of the call. Paul was not blinded by the bright light; he was instead illuminated his mind and opened his eyes to see the truth that the

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the Jesus he thought dead in Jerusalem was alive on the highway to Damascus, in divine splendor and in pwr. The Lord is my light and my salvation, the Psalmist sang; Paul knew it to be a fact that sharpened his vision. There are 2 parts to the speech as Lk wrote it--and it is likely that Lk was present and heard it with his own ears, and remembered it as he heard it. Part 1 is the apology, or the defense speech, vvl-23. Agrippa, Roman puppet king of the province, held court at Caesarea, a seaport on the Medit north of Palestine; it was a new city, built by Herod the Great about 40 yrs before Paul was there. Also present was Porcius Festus, Roman governor for the province of Judea. But it was to Agrippa that Paul addressed his remarks. He spoke not to the Roman, but to the Jew. I think myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I make my appeal to you, my defense against all the accusations of the Jews. You know their customs and controversies. Paul then described his education and his zeal as a young man who defended the Law against the blasphemers, and who as a Pharisee believed in what he called the hope in the promise made to God to our fathers. The context makes it clear that he referred to the promise of the resurrection, and offered that as proof of his Messiahship. V.8 has the question we all must confront and respond to, either to accept or to reject--there can be no middle ground. Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? It needs to be strongly emphasized that great numbers of people today cannot, or will not, accept the resurrection of Jesus and therefore of ourselves. Large numbers of them are members of Xn Chs. Last month in this building there was a symphonic and choral presentation of Gustav Mahler's Symphony #2, which the composer called the Resurrection Symphony. There is available a best-selling record of that music, conducted by a layman, a stockbroker and financial advisor who became enamored with Mahler's music, who owns the original handwritten score, and who makes no secret of his inability to believe in anything knowable after death. There is no resurrection, Gilbert Kaplan has said, and he is in a large and ^{eminent} respectable company. It has been frequently asserted that the Xn minister's missionary field is his own congregation. Paul knew the resurrection to be a fact in the case of Jesus, for he met the resurrected and triumphant Lord on the road. But he also knew that for those who believe the resurrection is not a hope in some future event, but is a present reality which becomes real by faith in J's resurrection. It should trouble all of us that it was not a pulpit preacher but an MD doctor in this city who recently urged seekers after faith to worship with a church whose members know themselves to be a resurrection community. Why should it be incredible that God the all-powerful raises the dead to life, puts incorruptibility upon the corruptible, and extends immortality to that which is mortal? How small is our God, or how large, and how described as Love? To many of us God is something we bring out on state occasions, magically present in the Bible which an official places hand upon when taking an oath. But God is much larger than that. God demands all of life, for God made it, and it is his gift to us to use to his glory and to our joy. Paul offered his pre-Damascus road existence as a mirror that reflected Judaism--and also much that goes under the name Xn--in opposition to the will and pwr of God, and to the faith and witness of the Ch. But after Damascus he knew by his own experience that J's death was swallowed up in life and power and majesty. It is possible that our own doubt about the miracle of Easter comes because we have not experienced the presence of God, and the eye-opening knowledge of God's love as revealed in Xr. As Paul remembered it in this version, on that road Jesus commanded him to serve and to bear witness to the things in which you have seen me, and to those in which I will appear to you, v16, to open the eyes of the Gentiles, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the pwr of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. This, in words of Jesus, heard and remembered and quoted by Paul, is the summary statement of the Xn faith and of its missionary message. May we read it, and remember it, and think about it. So much of what Xns in Churches do these days has more to do with things any social club in town also does, and may do even better, that we lose sight of what matters. Our lives, and our inner peace, are at stake here. Forgiveness of sin and a place among those who are sanctified both now and in a future resurrection of the just depends altogether upon the fundamentals of cross/resurrection/second coming, which to Paul was a package, a single event upon which our faith rests. Wherefore, Paul continued, v19, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. This is Paul at his greatest. Most of us go thru life never having a heavenly vision of anything; many of us who do see what is invisible to other eyes turn from it to seek power, or wealth, or popularity. But not Paul. He had a vision he did not imagine or invent; it picked him up violently and turned him in his tracks, and he was obedient to it. He was not perfect; he had human pride and vanity; and he may have wished for a small farm somewhere, perhaps like the one Cicero had at Tusculum, with a group of students to teach each morning. But he did not choose to be Xn preacher; he was chosen, and called, and to that he was obedient. Part 2 of the story is the response of Festus and Agrippa; one declared Paul to be insane; it is never easy for enlightened men & women of the world to add faith in the power of the invisible to their stock of knowledge. Agrippa responded with sarcasm, do you think to make me a Xn?, or as the older translation had it, the subject of many a sermon, Almost thou persuadest me. V29 is Paul's last word on Palestinian soil, and it is his prayer for us all, whether soon or late, may all of you be as I am, w/o these chains. ~~Part 3~~ is Agrippa's judgment that Paul was innocent and might be set free. But now he will go to Rome.
21 Conclusion

11-24-91. Rome. Last week in the Salem College Fine Arts Center there opened a showing which I urge all of you to see. It runs for another 10 days, thru Dec. 11. It has something valuable for all of us. It is a carefully designed presentation of an ancient near-eastern civilization called Aazudia. The exhibit includes examples of Aazudian pictorial art, and a written language etched into baked clay; colorful frescoes depicting a number of Aazudian activities, including a primitive form of basketball and a facsimile of the façade of Immundab Temple. It is an awesome showing, and what makes it all the more impressive is that it is all fiction. It exists in the present as the remains of what never was in the desert sands of the ancient world. Aazudian life is imaginary, the exhibit a work of contemporary art. It is a spoof, but a purposeful spoof, for its creator intended to teach a lesson about the light and life which was never part of earth or sky. It is therefore a provocative insight into the way moderns envision those who peopled our past. It is worth a visit, and some serious thought. It also may serve as introduction to the Biblical text which confronts us this morning. It tells of Paul's arrival and missionary work in Rome, & it invites us to consider the gap between what he regarded as important, and what many of us in these latter days emphasize. For scholarly commentary upon that matter let us hear the words of Nils Alstrup Dahl in a 1975 article about the neglected factor in NT theology. I quote: For more than a generation the majority of NT scholars have not only eliminated direct references to God in their works, but also neglected detailed and comprehensive investigation of statements about God. ..It is hard to find any comprehensive or penetrating study of the theme 'God in the NT.' In this, Prof. Dahl wrote, modern interpretation is directly at variance with that of the early Church. He quoted Oscar Cullmann, who wrote that early Xn theology is in reality almost exclusively Christology. Princeton theologian Christiaan Beker taught that the core of Paul's theology concerned the identity of the Xr-event and the coming triumph of God, the paradox between the already accomplished and the not-yet, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that J is Lord. It is that final victory to which the Ch must look, in hope and in faith. When the Kgdms of God becomes secondary to the present reign of Xr, then does the Ch lose its missionary ardor; then do clergymen become politicians contending for power in the present; then does the relig community compete w/ the world for imperial power and the purple robes of Roman military might. Then does the exhibit of Aazudian grandeur teach a lesson about the imagined and the real. Today we conclude a 3-month study of St. Paul, in a series entitled From the Damascus Road to Rome, and a theme of the expanding Xn Ch. We began in Sept with the dramatic appearance of the risen Lord to Saul the persecutor of Xns as he travelled the Damascus road in search of new victims to torment. At that moment something entirely new and timeless entered human history. Paul the apostle knew from personal experience that the Jesus he thought an imposter was true God of true God; begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father; one and the same Son and only-begotten God the Word, Lord J Xr. He knew that Jesus was not dead but that he lived, clothed in the light of God, in power and in glory. He knew that by his death upon the cross Jesus had given life abundantly, and eternal triumph, and the righteousness of God, to all who believed that God was in Xr reconciling the world unto himself. Nothing could be the same after that. Wolves would attack the sheep from without, and from within, but those who by faith expected the triumph of God would be preserved. That was Paul's message and his mission; as the pastor has never ceased to proclaim, nothing is certain but the resurrection. As Paul re-examined the Hebrew scriptures, and the messianic promises, he found an historical continuity between earlier truth and later truth, between expectations and realizations. This he preached to Jew and gentile, and this he taught to all who would listen. Today we have the final words of Lk's two-volume gospel, Acts 28: 17-31. At last Paul arrived in Rome. Luke reported it in understated clause, almost as an aside. V. 14, and so we came to Rome. The last 2 Chaps of Acts tell of the difficulties and risks of 1st Cen travel, in small boats which were at the mercy of the weather, and must find safe harbor during the violent winter storms. But Paul worked miracles with fellow passengers and with the crew, and with his own snake-bite. On the island of Malta they hibernated, awaiting the calmer seas of spring. Then they sailed northward to Italy, and overland from the toe of the boot, along that elegant Roman highway, to the capital of the world. It was a triumph of faith and perseverance; it was also symbolic of Lk's theme of the universal community of believers in Jesus the Xr. In Rome Paul was under house arrest, with a guard. He could not go to the Romans, so he invited them to come to him. As was his practice, he began with the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Here I depend upon the insight-filled commentary of Gerhard Krodel. To Luke the climax of his history was the confrontation in Rome between the Xn missionary and the Jewish ldrs. What he omitted is as important as what he included. Note there is no mention of the Roman Xn communities, those to whom he addressed his ltr to the Romans; he did not regard Rome as the center of gentile Xty, to replace Jerus, or Antioch in Syria. He did connect Rome to Jerus, for Paul's journey was in obedience to the divine will of God. In Lk only Rome and Jerus are expressly connected to the plan of God. Jerus is the center of the people of God, and symbol of the rejection of the gospel by the people of God; Rome is the center of the gentile world, and as the final sentence of Acts declares, is the symbol of the unhindered preach-

ing of the gospel. Paul's witness in Rome concludes and fulfills the mandate of Jesus to go to the end of the earth and teach the good news of the resurrection. V.23, Paul testified to the KgdM of God and tried to convince them about J both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Because Paul reached Rome, despite enormous difficulties, we may be assured that the gospel will reach the end of the earth. In addition, it is clear that Lk calls all his readers to take up the ministry of witnessing to the truth. But note also that Paul had come to Rome (27:24) to witness before Caesar, yet Lk omits any mention of that. Instead he gives a scene in which Paul talks to the Jewish ldrs, expounding all the day, and testifying to the kgdM of God. Because that is what Lk wrote, we must accept that it was what Lk regarded as crucial, as fundamental. Nothing is here about Paul's yrs in prison, or his death. To Lk, what mattered was Paul's witness, not his fate. What mattered was what Paul taught and believed. Paul's final words in Rome both summarize the history of the Xr-event, from baby in Bethlehem manger, to teaching in Rome, and also is a foundation for the future. All who believe are in the Bk of the Acts. It ends with 28:31, but then begins Chap 29, and 30, and on and on. All that has happened since a.d.60 is part of the Acts of the Apostles. We too are in that record, for Acts closes without ending. The story is continually being updated. Wolves within and without are passing phenomena; what is eternal is the spirit of God who giveth faith & life. The end did not come when Paul reached Rome; it will end when 1:11 the Messiah of God returns from heaven. It is the already and the not-yet that was Paul's faith. Two speeches by Paul are outlined in these few vv. First was the teaching, 23, in which Paul the Jewish scholar expounded the ancient promises to prove that Jesus the crucified was the anointed one of God. It was because of the hope of Israel v.20 that he was bound in chains. That hope, Paul knew, was fulfilled in Jesus who was God's chosen, who was Xr, who was raised from the dead. He knew that by faith all people everywhere may share in the resurrection and in the new life which it makes available to us. The other speech is a reminder that Jesus in Nazareth at the beginning of his public ministry, Lk4:18 quoted the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61. ~~for~~ Paul quoted ~~another prophecy~~ in Isaiah, Ch6, when God called Isaiah to be prophet and told him at that time that he would be rejected. People with ears shall not hear, and their eyes fail to perceive, and they turn from healing. Let it be known, Paul concluded, 28:28, the last words of Paul that Luke wrote, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, who will listen. If you use the older translation you will see a v.29 which is lacking in 20th Century readings; it is not present in the best of the ancient MSS, and it spoils the dramatic climax and meaning of Paul's last words. // It should chill our souls. It says that we are given the chance to hear the good news, and to respond to it, but that God's patience is not without limit. If we in this most favored continent reject the appeal of God, if ministers no longer preach Xr and him crucified, the hope of salvation, // and if we citizens choose the life of the sensual, and the selfish, and the drugged, and the violent, then we should not be astounded that God would turn to others, who will listen. The final words of Acts, 30,31, are the triumphant conclusion of Lk's story. Neither Jewish rejection nor Roman cruelty can hinder the teaching of the salvation of God in the death and resurrection of the Lamb. Thus we reach the end of the text, and the beginning of the expansion of the Ch into the world of the non-Jews. Perhaps a brief summary of Paul's reverberations through the annals of the past 2000 yrs is in order. Rarely has there been anyone more hated and loved with such strong passion. Within the community of faith Paul is the single and greatest source of teaching about the meaning of Xr's death on the cross which is on top of spires all over the world, and hangs on the wall above the altar in thousands of Chs. He was, as a biographer said, expressly sent into the world to do the work required by the juncture of history, in which they ~~fell~~; he was precisely the man for his time. He was startlingly original in what the spirit taught him about the reality of God incarnate, and he in turn taught us all what the Xn gospel is, and what it means. Karl Barth, whose 1922 book on the ltr to the Romans literally turned the Xn world upon its head, said that Paul speaks to men of every age..if we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul. Not long ago A.R. Vidler wrote that Paul is desperately needed today, in our world. Vidler died last month after a long & distinguished career as divinity professor at Cambridge in England. As we neglect Paul we lose the fundamentals of the revelation of God in Xr, and we miss the glorious promises of life in the already, in the now, and in the future, in the not-yet. The shift between present triumph and future hope is in Rom 8:17--heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Xr, there is the present; provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him, and there is the future, what is yet to be. All things work for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, Rom 8:28. ~~In the light of~~ the coming triumph, the final victory which God will accomplish, wipes out the contradictions of the present. The God of the End-time, who acted in Xr, is for Paul also the God of the Beginning time; those he ~~for~~knew he predestined and called, and justified, and glorified, 8:28-30. That coming glory was present before time began. It is assured by the resurrection of Xr. It is the basic coherence of Paul's teaching and faith. We can know the truth that Paul knew only as we make the surrender that Paul made, and the devotion to mission which was his. As the curtains close at the end of the story, we hear Paul plead with us to take Jesus as Messiah and Lord, and to look beyond the partial achievement to the final triumph of God.