

Acts 28:30-31

Second Sunday Morning After Pentecost, June 13, 2004

Jack and Anthony have done splendid jobs in presenting their mission trip experiences. Jack and the Sons of Jubal were in Moldova and the Czech Republic. Anthony and the Tabernacle Team were in the Mississippi Delta. Thank you.

Last Sunday, June 6, 2004, the 60th Anniversary of D-Day, I was in the province of Normandy in France at the D-Day Beaches. I can't begin to emphasize the emotion that I, along with 65 high school students from the Carrollton High School Band and their adult chaperones, experienced. It was awe-inspiring to say the least. It was unbelievable.

There was a peacefulness in the American Cemetery at Normandy. There was also a peacefulness in the German Cemetery. Now my saying there was a peacefulness in the German Cemetery may offend you. I really don't care if it does. I am a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that Gospel is a word about peace for all peoples.

Over the past 60 years, relationships between various peoples all over this planet have been strengthened. Obstacles have been overcome in Moldova and even though there is a Communist ruler in that nation, there is obviously an openness to the Gospel. And can you imagine? Missions in the Mississippi Delta? Forty years ago Mississippi was burning. She was aflame with racism unimaginable and violence that could even compare to that of Nazi Germany. That, too, may offend you. I really don't care if it does, because it's true.

There is something about the Gospel that penetrates and overcomes the color of skin and nationalities. There is something about the Gospel that creates a lack of hindrance. As God's people we can keep on going without hindrance.

I deliberately chose this text out of the Book of Acts because it conveys this sense of "without hindrance." It is also a rather odd, yet profound, way for Luke to end the story of the Gospel's advance. The story of Jesus, which began in volume one, known as the Gospel of Luke, continued in volume two, known as the Acts of the Apostles or, more appropriately, the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Allow me to give you a quick grammar lesson in Greek. This will help put into perspective this rather odd way to end Acts. Most of you know that in English sentences are not supposed to be ended with prepositions like the word "with." OK, I realize I just ended the sentence with "with." Oops! There I go again! In Greek you are not supposed to end a sentence with an adverb. It's just one of those Greek things. Yet that is precisely what Luke does. In the Greek text he ends his second volume with an adverb, literally translated "unhindered." ***"He [Paul, that is] lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (vv. 30-31).***

So what's the point? Luke wanted his first readers, and now you and me, to understand that nothing could stop the proclamation of the Gospel. Nothing could stop the teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing could cause it to cease. What we are to understand today is that the Gospel continues on and on, and on and on, without hindrance.

Communism may prevail in some parts of the world. Racism may still prevail in some parts of the United States. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not hindered. Let us never forget that. Let us never forget that in the goodness of God and in the power of His Holy Spirit, He removes all of those hindrances, including communism and racism and whatever, in due time.

Last week I was privileged to walk on Omaha Beach. Again, I can't begin to tell you what I experienced as I envisioned that day 60 years prior. I did a lot of reading prior to the trip. I read several

books and articles. I watched as many documentaries as I could on the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, and PBS about D-Day.

As I walked on Omaha Beach, I envisioned all those obstacles that had been placed there by the Germans to prevent allied soldiers from coming onto that beach in particular, but all the beaches in general. On D-Day, it wasn't just Americans who landed and died. There were Americans, British, Free French, Poles, and Canadians who came onto those five beaches facing all those barriers, hindrances that they were. Many died, especially in the first wave. There was determination, though, as they kept pushing and pushing and pushing until finally they got beyond all those beach hindrances. They kept on going even as they pushed further into France encountering hedgerow after hedgerow. They were able to keep on moving.

So it is with the Gospel. There may be an occasional hindrance or two, but the Gospel will continue to be proclaimed. The Gospel of Jesus Christ will continue to be announced and taught. The Gospel of Jesus Christ will continue to make a difference. And because it will, we are supposed to keep on going just like the allied forces kept on going 60 years ago. It is up to you and me, however, to determine whether or not we'll keep on going without hindrance.

Oh, beloved, I sometimes wonder if some of us are more comfortable living in pity for ourselves and erecting hindrances of our own. There are folk who really believe that the ACLU is going to shut the church down. I don't believe that for one minute. I pray you don't either. There are people who really believe we have to get prayer back in the public schools. Prayer, by the way, is still there. Prayer never left and never will leave the public sector because it is a matter of the heart. There are those who think that if the Ten Commandments don't get hung up in every public building that our nation will crumble. I don't believe that. I want us to hang the Ten Commandments up – hang them up in our hearts and live by them so all can see them fleshed out practically every day. That's much better than hanging them on walls or engraving them in granite monuments. It doesn't cost as much, either. Or, on the other hand, maybe it does cost more to hang the commandments up in our hearts.

There is so much on the World Wide Web that is false, so much so, that there are times when I want to take my computer and just throw it out the window. I have said this before and will continue to say it. I am foolish enough to believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will never be silenced. It has made it 2000 years and if the Lord tarries His return for another 2000 years, and He could very well do that, I have every confidence that people will still go to Moldova and the Czech Republic – communism or democracy. I have every confidence that people will still go to Mississippi – racism or no racism. I have every confidence that people will still go to Mexico. I have every confidence that people will still go to Mozambique. They will still go to France. They will still go to England. They will still go to East Allison Circle. They will go unhindered.

They will go all over the world because no one can hinder the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It cannot be hindered by anyone or anything. I grieve because I sometimes wonder if we honest to God believe that. The longer I live, the more I sense some people wish it wouldn't expand because of the lasting peace that the Gospel is able to bring to all peoples who are in Christ – whether they are buried in an American Cemetery or a German Cemetery.

One of the final acts in Normandy was placing a wreath at the grave of a Georgia soldier who was killed on D-Day. His name was Edgar L. Clark, a Private in the United States Army. None of us knows how old he was when he died on June 6, 1944. We gathered at his grave on Monday morning. Wesley Helton, the Carrollton High School Trojan Band Captain for this coming year, along with the recently graduated seniors, gently placed a wreath on his grave. Mr. Carter asked me to lead in a time of prayer and meditation. What a moving experience. I thought about what Isaiah said and I prayed that even in my lifetime, especially in the lifetime of these high school students, the vision of Isaiah would become a reality in which nation will not lift up sword against nation, and that human beings will not ever learn war again – not ever. I prayed and still pray that nations will take their swords and beat them into plowshares,

that they will take all their nuclear devices and disarm them. I prayed that all humankind would live in peace and tranquility for the sake of fellows like Private Edgar L Clark from Appling County, Georgia and for the sake of all the others in that cemetery on Omaha Beach. I even prayed it for the sake of all those buried in that German Cemetery across the way.

A year ago this past March, I preached a sermon entitled, “God Loves the World. All of It – Even France.” Remember that one? I discovered first hand this past week that, by golly, He really does. He doesn’t love us more than He loves them. He loved every American who died in Normandy and throughout World War II. He loved every German. He loved every Pole. He loved every Russian. He loved every Japanese. He loved every Italian. He loved! He loved! He loved! Why? Because His Son, Jesus Christ, died for all peoples. He died for every citizen of every nation on Earth. In a poignant moment at the grave of a guy none of us ever knew, Private Edgar L. Clark, I remembered that God loves all the world even when the world doesn’t agree with me and my politics.

Each of us, in that cemetery, experienced a reminder that we are part of the human race. Ideologies are different, of course. Political philosophies clash, most definitely. But we are a part of a humanity that has been created by one God, whose name is not Buddha whose tenets aren’t expressed in Buddhism; His name is not Mohammad whose tenets are expressed in Islam; His name is not Zoroaster whose tenets are expressed in Zoroastrianism; and His name is not Vishnu whose tenets are expressed in Hinduism. His name is Jehovah. And Jehovah God has revealed His kingdom in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, for all humanity to see. His love, through Jesus Christ, is for anybody and everybody.

So what are you and I to do? We are to get up and go to Moldova and the Czech Republic, aren’t we Jack? We are to get up and go to Mississippi, aren’t we Anthony? We are to get up and go to Mexico. To Panama. To Mozambique. We are to get up and go anywhere and everywhere that God calls us to go. And we are to never let our pettiness and pity hinder the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Dare I say that we are to never let our theology hinder our going? God forbid! God forbid!

“He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (vv. 30-31). Well, what are you going to do? Keep on going forward without hindrance, I hope.

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All scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version, 1989.