



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jump Start # 2195

Acts 28:7 "Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us three days."

Our verse today comes from the last page of Acts. Paul, as a prisoner, is on a journey to Rome. He is to stand before Caesar. The Jews had beaten Paul, and arrested him. Had he not declared his desire to be tried by Caesar, he likely would have died in Jerusalem. So, aboard a ship he travels. The journey was full of trouble. The ship encountered a violent storm and capsized. Paul had to swim to safety. They made it to the island of Malta, where our verse takes place. While there, Paul is bitten by a poisonous snake but no harm comes to him. He will spend three months on this island before continuing on to Rome where he will be in prison and eventually executed.

But while on Malta, Paul meets Publius, a kind and generous man who welcomed them and entertained them for several days. Paul was not treated as a prisoner. He found rest for his body and nourishment for his soul. We are not told if Publius ever became a Christian. It's hard to imagine being in the presence of Paul for any length of time and that subject not coming up.

I find it interesting that Publius gets one sentence in the Bible. The Holy Spirit wanted us to know about this kind and generous person who helped Paul. There are lessons to be seen here.

First, people who are not Christians can be nice and generous. Those qualities do not belong exclusively to Christians. It is a false generalization to assume that everyone who is not a Christian is selfish, stingy, greedy and anti-Christ. Sometimes, people in the world do a better job of showing kindness than the Christians do. I've heard the sad stories of people saying that neighbors brought food, but no one from the church did. Or, neighbors offered rides to the doctors office, or came and did yard work, and people in the church never called. That happens. Be careful of painting the picture that people in the world are evil and wicked. Publius certainly seems to be a pretty nice person.

Second, do not turn away the generosity of others, even if they are not Christians. There are two sides to generosity, the ones that give and the ones that receive. There are two sides to hospitality, the one that gives and the one that receives. There are two sides of kindness, the one that gives and the one that receives. Accept gifts with thankfulness. There are those who want to do things, but if we always refuse then they do not get an opportunity to serve.

(OVER)

Sometimes our pride is just a bit too much and rather than ask for help, we struggle on our own. As a preacher, I've visited hospitals a zillion times. I think nothing about it. However, there was one occasion several years ago when I was the guy in the hospital bed. People came to see me. I didn't like that. It was very awkward for me to have people coming to cheer me up and to see how I was doing. But I learned a lesson from that. It's important to receive as it is to give.

Paul did not refuse the generosity of Publius. Wet, tired, bitten by a snake, Paul certainly needed some comfort. He easily could have said, "I don't know you," or, "I'll be fine." Instead, he allowed Publius to help Paul. Publius was the giver and Paul was the receiver. And, in that setting, evangelism and sharing the Gospel can take place. I've known folks lying in a hospital bed who have shared the Gospel with nurses and doctors. After a fender bender and names and insurance information has been exchanged, I've known some who used the occasion to invite others to services.

A child in the congregation draws you a picture. Make a big deal about it. They were thinking of you. Someone offers to bring some food, thank them and allow them. We can only serve if someone is willing to accept what we are doing.

Third, Publius welcomed Paul for three days. That wasn't very long. But for three days, Paul was loved and accepted. Shouldn't this be the motto of our congregations. We welcome you. Some may come like Paul, shipwrecked, wet and bitten by the serpent. They may smell like the world, or in Paul's case, like the sea. They may look rough. They may not be able to offer much. Yet, Publius welcomed Paul. We need to open the doors to welcome the lost. The woman who is covered with tattoos ought to be able to come into our assemblies and worship without going through a crowd of stares and whispers. The guy who looks homeless, and maybe he is, ought to be allowed to worship. Jesus didn't run off the woman at the well who had been married multiple times and currently was living with someone. She fits in our times exactly. Not everyone will be the nice, neat, educated Nicodemus. Some are spiritual shipwrecks. Some have messy lives. Yet, if they are seeking, should we not welcome them and help them spiritually the best that we can.

Fourth, Publius was with Paul for three days. That's not very long. But those three days not only made a difference, it was noted by God and recorded by the Holy Spirit. We all have life long friends, dear, dear people in our lives that mean so much to us. But I wonder about the Publius' in our lives. There for just a short time. Maybe the family that worships only a few months and then job transfers take them far away. Yet, for that short time, they left an impression. Their smiles. Their kindness. Their love for the Lord. I expect all of us have those memories of people that intersected with our lives for just a short time. Years later, we may even have a hard time remembering their names, but we remember the gift, the kindness, their passion for the Lord. I remember a young man like this. Boy, he could lead singing like no one else. He always smiled so big. He took my family out to eat when we had just moved to a new place. But in no time he moved on. But, like Publius, he left an impression upon our hearts and my kids still fondly remember him. Be thankful for such people. They often do more and leave a greater impression than some folks who have been around since Moses. And, then, you may stand in the shadows of Publius, yourself some day. Do what you can for others. You may not see them again, but you can welcome, comfort and help, even for a short time.

The welcoming Publius. The one sentence man in the Bible. The one who made a difference for Paul. You won't hear many sermons about Publius. But for a brief moment in time, he was one who made a difference.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)