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St. James the Elder, Apostle (Observed)
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Acts 11:27–12:5
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

Remember show and tell? It was one of the best things about kindergarten. You got to bring something from home, something personal, something that you wanted to tell everyone else about. You showed a favorite thing to all your friends. And you told them about it. Some kids would bring a favorite toy—a Barbie doll, a teddy bear, a GI Joe. Some would bring a pet—a dog, a cat, a bird, a tarantula. One kid brought a python to class for show and tell. The teacher screamed. Some kids ran and hid. Most thought it was pretty cool. The kid who brought it didn't have to tell much. The snake spoke for itself.

Show and tell. That's what the baptized children of God do. They show and tell their Baptism. They show and tell Jesus' death and resurrection for the life of the world. They show and tell the love of Jesus.

Jerusalem and Antioch were a couple of show-and-tell congregations. Showing and telling the love of Jesus to each other while the world looked and listened in. Jerusalem was the established mother church. The church of the Apostles. Where Pentecost happened. Antioch was the younger daughter, the mission congregation.

Persecution drove believers from Jerusalem to the coast of Phoenicia, to the island of Cyprus, and to Antioch in Syria. Persecution is never pleasant. But sometimes God uses it to get the Church out of her comfort zone. Imagine how hard it must have been for those people. Driven from their homes. Separated from family. Without work, income. No savings to fall back on. Their lives were turned upside-down. All because they let the death and resurrection of Jesus show through their lives. Imagine the temptation to deny Jesus to save home, family, job.

The breath of God blows. The fire of Pentecost spreads, even under persecution. The Church is like those brush fires my grandparents experienced in Oklahoma when everything is dry and the wind comes rolling down the plains. Try and stomp the fire out

and you wind up setting off three or four new ones. The harder you stomp, the more fires you start. The harder the Church is pressed and persecuted, the more believers spring up.

The Church isn't the only ones who show and tell. The world does, as well. They raise their signs and chant their love of abortions. They parade their sin down our streets and into our children's classrooms, doing things so disgusting and horrific that they're not fit to mention before God's people. The world embraces anger, throwing out insults and crude emojis, declaring that violence against others is sometimes permissible. And so the world goes into Mall food courts and school buildings and shoots people. The world shows us what they want. They tell us what they believe.

I wish it were new. But it isn't. Apostle James, whom we commemorate today, was killed with the sword by the government. King Herod showed and told his hatred of the Church. And when King Herod saw that it pleased some others, he went after St. Peter, having him arrested. In fact, the beloved John was the only apostle not to die a martyr's death. Jesus shows and tells us life. The world shows and tells only death.

Because the world only shows and tells death and sin that leads to death, the apostles and the churches made certain to proclaim the life that only Jesus shows and tells.

Scattered disciples immediately began showing and telling the great Good News wherever they went. First, they went only to their fellow Jews. Remember how great the prejudice was between Jew and Gentile. It was greater than any racial or ethnic tension we might know or experience today—perhaps we're getting closer to that. God forbid!

It isn't surprising that the Jewish Christians from Judea went only to their fellow Jews. We do the same thing. Stay within our own backyard. Not reach across walls and boundaries. When we do that, we rob ourselves of the joy of show and tell. We cheat others of Jesus. We put limits on His love.

God knows no boundaries. Jesus doesn't care whether a person is a Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, rich or poor, black or white, Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, or whatever other category we invent. The woman with ragged clothing going into Muncie Mission to get a handout, the Ball State University student, the farmers from Blackford and Henry counties, the girl who shows up to church in beach sandals, the fidgety little ones—these are all for whom Jesus hung on a cross and died.

What do we show and tell? What does the world see? What does the world hear?

Is it our worship? The rejoicing way we go about our day-to-day business? Is it our love for Jesus and for one another? Is that what the world saw in Antioch and Jerusalem? Whatever it was, something made a deep impression. Their neighbors called them *Xristianoï*, Christians. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. And they bore the name Christian proudly, even to their deaths.

From where did Antioch learn to be such a way? They learned it from the Apostles, from those chosen witnesses of Christ who forsook everything to follow Jesus and preach the great Good News. And James and Peter and the rest learned it from Christ Himself. They—and we ourselves—are but a reflection. Jesus, the bright, shining sun. His preaching and teaching, His devotion and compassion, His death and resurrection—these are the things they saw and learned from. “No greater love than this,” showed our Lord as He lay down His life for the world. “We love because He first loved us,” told the disciples as they likewise laid down their lives.

Antioch went on to become a great church. It was the center of foreign missions—the church that sent Paul and Barnabas and Silas. Archaeologists have uncovered over 20 churches in the ruins of Antioch. It was also the site of a great theological school. While Antioch grew, Jerusalem declined. The Christians there were scattered by the rampage of the Roman army. But the Word of the Lord grew. The Gospel spread. People believed and were baptized. “The hand of the Lord was with them.”

Can we—Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Muncie—can we be a show-and-tell people like Antioch or Jerusalem? Can our lives become as transparent to the love of Jesus as those people in Antioch who were first called Christians? Can we experience the joy of those early congregations? We can. But first look and listen. God has something to show us; He has something to tell us.

Recall your Baptism. There God showed you who you are, and He told you what that means. You are God’s children. You belong to God’s family. Jesus’ death and life are yours. You are reborn and renewed and refreshed. You are accepted by God. Clothed with Jesus. Covered with Him. Sealed with His Spirit. Signed with His cross. Remember, you didn’t choose Him, He chose you. You are baptized!

Taste the bread that is Jesus' Body given for you. Drink the wine that is His Blood shed for you. Receive these tokens of His love. You are welcome at His Table. He laid down His life for you. He calls you "friend."

Hear the forgiveness He speaks to you. Don't be afraid to ask for forgiveness. You are baptized. Jesus promised, "Whatever you ask in My name, My Father will give you." Ask for the little stuff, but also ask for big stuff—ask for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Don't be afraid to be forgiven by God and by others. And don't be afraid to live in the freedom of forgiveness.

Look and listen—to what God is doing with you, and with those around you in this congregation, in your home, at work, at school, around this town and throughout the community. Show and tell what Christ has done for you. He fills us to overflowing with His life and love and joy. He says, "Now share what I give to you. Let My love flow through you to those I put around you. Be fruitful. Forgive one another as I have forgiven you. Love one another as I have loved you. Tell everyone I died for them. And show it."

Be careful, though. That kind of show-and-tell could get us labeled. If we do this, people might just call us Christian.

In Jesus' name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.