

## INI

Acts 16,6-15

Sexagesima — 8 February 2015

**Greeting:** To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from Saint Luke's Acts of the Apostles, which was read earlier:

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

**So far the reading. Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Introduction:** If you lived where we live, in between Foothill and Mission, then you wouldn't be surprised to hear sirens at any time of the day or night. It could be a police car. It could be a fire engine. It could be an ambulance. Sometimes you don't know, because it is hard to tell them apart.

But when you hear a siren, one thought goes through you head, "This can't be good." Someone is either in distress and help has been summoned, or someone is being transported to hospital. In either of those scenarios, minutes count and peoples' lives may be at stake. Those first responders have a critical calling and people depend on them in matters of life and death.

Our Epistle lesson for today from Saint Luke's account in Acts

also shows us a critical calling. But instead of earthly lives being at stake, eternal life is at stake. It is a matter of spiritual life and death. Thus, we see Paul make a change of plans, a virtual about face, and meet the call to go from Asia Minor to Europe, and there share the Word of Life about Jesus, a Word which brings life eternal.

This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “**Missionary Activity Is A Critical Calling.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Seeing The Need**
- 2) Obeying The Call;** and,
- 3) Knowing The Results**

**1) Seeing The Need.** The year is about AD 50 and Paul is beginning his second missionary journey. He had already made plans to visit some of the congregations he had founded during his first journey in order to comfort and to strengthen them. Paul’s ministry consisted in being commissioned by Jesus and being led by the Holy Spirit. Now in the kind of Call he had and in the leading he experienced, he was quite different from us. What he did, however, we can do also. We have been called to witness to Christ and in this endeavor we also are assisted and led by the Holy Spirit. And as we are called to witness to our Lord and Savior, we should always be aware of those who might need our spiritual help and then be prepared to help them.

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” This vision appeared to Paul in the port city of Troas. Paul was in Troas because while he wanted to continue his missionary activity in Asia Minor, God didn’t want him to and God had other plans for him. Thus we read about Paul:

They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia; <sup>7</sup> and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; <sup>8</sup> and passing by Mysia,

they came down to Troas.

Apparently Paul did not quite get it. He wanted to go northwest to Bithynia, but God said “No.”

We aren't told how the Holy Spirit revealed to Paul and his companions that they were not to continue in Asia Minor. And then the Spirit of Jesus – really the Holy Spirit with another name – just stopped them cold from going further. How did this happen? It could have been a vision, it could have been adverse circumstances, it could have been good sense, it could have been good use of the prophetic gift – we just do not know.

The Spirit, however, led Paul and Silas and Timothy to the port city of Troas, where Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia. Now the Spirit was opening a new door of missionary endeavor for Paul and his companions.

The unnamed Macedonian said to Paul, “Come ... and help us!” This was a cry for help. Today, if that person were in physical danger, he would call 911 and then the air would be filled with sirens. But this was a call for spiritual help – but the danger was as great if not greater than if it had been physical danger. As a matter of fact, even where we live people are quick to speak of physical dangers, but reluctant to speak of spiritual dangers.

The spiritual blindness of unbelievers is varied. Some are so satisfied with themselves and the world in their economic condition, family situation, health, and so forth, that they see no need for Christ. Others are so down in the dumps with economic misfortune, marital problems, health problems, you name it, that they see the world through ebony colored glasses and cannot see a God Who in Christ wishes to help them. In any case, when we encounter these individuals, it is up to us to identify the problem.

We live in a sinful world, in which all who are born into this world

are sinners. And we do well to remember that this also described us. We also needed help, and thankfully for most of us our parents gave that to us when they brought us to the waters of Holy Baptism, where we were baptized into the death of Jesus to die to sin and then to rise in His resurrection to newness of life before God. Others of us came to Christ as adults, when others saw our need and spoke of Jesus' redeeming work on our behalf.

Because others saw our spiritual need for salvation, we should always remember that others may stand in need of hearing that Good News as well. Now it is true that some may not want to hear this – may not want to hear that they are sinners for whom Christ went to the Cross. But thanks be to God, others will!

To speak about Jesus is a critical calling, especially when we see the spiritual needs of others. To see this need, we needn't go across the ocean, although some are called to do just that. As a matter of fact, very often those in need may be in our family circle, our neighborhood, our circle of friends, our co-workers, and so forth.

Thus, we not only seeing the need, but we should be

## **2) Obeying The Call.** Luke writes:

When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them.

<sup>11</sup> So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a *Roman* colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

Paul and his co-workers immediately knew Who stood behind this call to come to Macedonia – none less than God Himself. Thus, they lost no time in arranging passage on the next ship out of Troas, getting to

Samothrace and then continuing sailing along the coast until they arrived at Neapolis. At Neapolis they disembarked and then probably set off by foot to Philippi. Neapolis was the seaport for Philippi and Philippi was a mere 10 miles away.

Why go to Philippi? Well, it was the capitol of the region – Macedonia consisted of four regions. It was also an independent city and its administration was modeled on that of Rome. It was settled by a large number of retired legionnaires. Apparently it did not have enough Jews to form a synagogue.

What we can learn from Paul are the consequences of obeying God's call. We should not believe that it is always easy to follow God's calling. More often than not, Paul experienced the hatred and opposition of others as they rejected the Good News that he was bring to them. He also had to endure beatings and imprisonment – and that was one of the things that would befall he and Silas in Philippi (Acts 16,23ff). In spite of this, he clung to God's call more than just the desire to have a peaceful life. He could do that because as Paul would later write to the Romans:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present age not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to revealed to us. (Romans 8,18)

But God has also called us to be His witnesses and would have us work for Him as fishers of men. As Our Lord immediately before His Ascension:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28,19-20)

These words apply not just to those who have been formally installed as missionaries, but to each and every Christian. Jesus' words and His promise are for each Christian throughout the ages until He comes again.

The apostle Peter tells us of yet another reason to obey God's calling. He writes:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup> for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2,9-10)

We have been called to be heirs of the heavenly glory revealed to us in Christ Jesus. That heavenly glory is the light of forgiveness won for us on the Cross by Jesus. This is something we can share with others who are in need of forgiveness in the place of condemnation, the promise of spiritual life in the face of the verdict of spiritual death apart from Christ.

When we realize all this, perhaps we'll look at our calling to be witnesses to Jesus with a renewed enthusiasm, because God says we'll be

**3) Knowing The Results.** What was the immediate result of Paul's journey to Philippi?

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

<sup>14</sup> A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

What can we learn from how Paul approached his mission in

## Philippi?

Whenever Paul went into a strange city he looked for a synagogue. But if there was no synagogue in the city, then he went down to the river – most cities were built beside rivers – on a Sabbath day to see if there might be Jews who would be praying to the One true God.

Paul went to the Jews first because spiritually he and they would be speaking the same language and also have the same point of reference – the Old Testament and its promises that would point to Christ.

So Paul spoke to Lydia and those who were with her – maybe her female companions? But what do we read about the results of that conversation?

... and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

It wasn't up to Paul. The Lord, using the testimony of Paul, a testimony which he elsewhere has said that he was determined to know only one thing, Christ and Him crucified, opened Lydia's heart. It is as our Gospel lesson says, the Seed fell on good soil. It is as our Old Testament lesson says, God's Word will not return unto Him void, that is without accomplishing the thing for which it was sent.

God's Word will always have results. We rejoice when the result is a seeming success, as with the case of Lydia. Not only did she come to faith, but her whole household also came to faith and was baptized.

But on the flip side, we know that neither Paul nor us always have outward success. In Athens, for example, some scoffed, but some said that they would hear more of this (Acts 17,32). A few verses beyond our text, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison for their troubles. God's Word of Law and Gospel always brings a reaction. And sometimes, after the seed has been planted it takes quite a while to see the results.

**Conclusion:** In spiritual matters, belief or unbelief in Jesus is a matter of life and death. When people are physically threatened, sirens often ring out as help is on the way. Unfortunately, with unbelief, the call for help maybe a but more subtle.

But God has called each of us to be on the alert for those opportunities where we can share our faith, share our hope in Christ. Perhaps it might be as simple as sharing a tract, or inviting someone to church, or perhaps speaking at greater length about Jesus – and when we do not know the words or feel anxious, never underestimate the power of bringing another soul to God in prayer. When we have done this, we have discharged our calling and leave things in the hands of our loving God.

We would ask that God would grant us all the ability to say as Peter said: “for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4,20). We would pray that in the circumstances of life I which God has placed us, He would give us all the ability to see the need for others to hear about Jesus, to be faithful in sharing that Word, and rejoicing in that the results are up to God. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay & Central Valley  
21290 Birch St.  
Hayward, CA 94541-1538

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