

Easter 6

May 22, 2022

Acts 16:9-15

⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul^[c] had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the^[d] district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Psalm 67

¹ May God be merciful to | us and bless us,*

show us the light of his countenance, and | come to us. (Selah)

² Let your ways be known | upon earth,*

your saving health a- | mong all nations.

³ Let the peoples praise | you, O God;*

let all the | peoples praise you.

⁴ Let the nations be glad and | sing for joy,*

for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations | upon earth. (Selah)

⁵ Let the peoples praise | you, O God;*

let all the | peoples praise you.

⁶ The earth has brought | forth her increase;*

may God, our own God, give | us his blessing.

⁷ May God give | us his blessing, *

and may all the ends of the earth stand in | awe of him.

Revelation 21:10, 22—22:5

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. Then the angel^[a] showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life^[b] with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

John 14:23-29

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be

afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.

Message: All the Nations

By the time of the story recounted in our 1st lesson occurred, Paul was well established in the ministry of sharing the good news of Jesus with the Gentiles. Having recently completed a missionary journey to Derbe and Lystra where he met Timothy who was to become one of Paul's dearest friends, the mission team consisting of Paul, Luke, Timothy, and Silas initially turned towards Asia. But the Scriptures tell us that the Holy Spirit prevented them from going there (Why, we do not know.). So instead, the group shifted their focus northwest of their original goal to the territory called Bithynia (today known as northern Turkey). But before they could depart, Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia urging him to come there instead. Macedonia is north of present-day Greece.

We're not told how long the journey took them, but traveling by sea from Troas to Neapolis by way of Samothrace was about 120 miles across the Aegean Sea. From the port city of Neapolis they traveled on the Roman roads to Philippi. Despite the vision that led them there, Paul and the mission team must have been a little skeptical. Philippi lay on the main road leading from Rome to Byzantium which would become Constantinople. Unlike Athens, which was known for its academic and intellectual curiosity, Philippi was a rough Roman town, a crossroads of cultures and heavy with the traffic of the empire.

But for all its diversity, it had very few Jews. We heard in this morning's lesson that there was no synagogue. In order for a synagogue to be built, there had to be what the Jews called a minyan, a consortium of at least 10 learned men able to read the scriptures. Philippi didn't even have that! Instead, the few Jews there might have been and those described as "God-fearers" customarily met by the side of a nearby river.

All this meant that Paul would be starting from scratch in his evangelistic endeavors. There would be no core group that shared the common history of the people of Israel or had a knowledge of a messiah with whom he might begin a dialogue or conversation, just a group of women. There was one who stood out a bit – a businesswoman from the city of Thyatira, a city in Asia Minor. Described as a "seller of purple", the implication was that she

was likely rather successful and somewhat affluent due to the fact that the materials used to dye fabrics the color of purple were very expensive.

If Paul had been part of a typical evangelism team by today's standards, this would hardly have been the place or the audience he would have chosen for new recruits, new members! But that is just the point! None of this was Paul's idea! It is noteworthy that the content of his message that morning that spoke to the heart of Lydia is not recorded; we don't know what he said! That is because it wasn't Paul's work that converted her – it was the work of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus proclaimed, "I will build my church"; it was God himself that converted Lydia! Romans 10:17 declares, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ". We affirm as much in the Lutheran Church in the Augsburg Confession that states, "the Holy Spirit creates faith where and when he pleases in those who hear the gospel."

The good news of Jesus was never going to go beyond the borders of Israel if mission team second-guessed where to go or cherry picked to whom they were going to go to share the story of Jesus! Lydia had to prevail, she had to insist on the mission team staying at her home. There were plenty of good reasons why the Jewish mission team would decline an invitation to stay in the home of a single Gentile businesswoman!

The Psalm we sang together this morning affirmed not just once or twice but at least eight times that *all* the people will praise the God of Israel, *all* the nations will be glad and sing for joy. Church history scholars who trace the development and expansion of the early church note that the church that began in the house of Lydia in the town of Philippi went on to become one of the congregations that was most dear to Paul's heart – the congregation to whom he wrote the epistle to the Philippians! Not only that, but the fledgling house church of Lydia marked the first time the gospel expanded into the continent of Europe; *all* the nations to the end of the earth will stand in awe of him!

Paul and his mission team were as different from the women gathered that morning at the riverside as one could possibly imagine. But they were bound together by the one Lord, one faith, and one baptism that they shared. The Revelation scripture we heard declares that in the new Jerusalem all the citizens will share the distinction of having his name on their foreheads. Across time and space, believers in Jesus continue to bear that mark and seal; in our baptism we are marked with the cross of Christ and sealed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit forever!

The Great Commission given to us by Jesus is to go and make disciples of *all nations*. If they should happen to become members of our congregation, well

and good. But they may in turn be chosen by God to go to some other distant "Macedonia" and tell others about Jesus.

May we be found to be obedient to the call.

Thanks be to God!

Prayers of the Church

Let us pray to our risen Savior on behalf of the Church, the world, and one another.

A brief silence

Lord Jesus, blessed Bridegroom, thank you for making us your beloved Bride, even giving your life for us! Thank you for making your Church, now troubled by evils within and without, the glorious New Jerusalem! Thank you for promising us joy in our fellowship with you and one another!
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant to your Church the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Grant that, in a world shadowed by suffering, sorrow and sin, it proclaims your promise of joy, and shares the blessings of your love.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Confessing your name brings great trouble to many Christians around the world. Assure them that you have overcome the world. Grant them such deep joy that their enemies are astonished, and repent.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let the Spirit fill every heart in this congregation with joy. Make that joy blossom into heartfelt worship, loving service, truthful witness, deep prayer, and loving fellowship. Use us to draw our friends and neighbors closer to you. May we shed the light of your love and joy in the darkest corners of their lives.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give your joyous presence to our teenagers. It is easy to be preoccupied with school, sports, jobs, and friends. It can be hard to endure teasing or scorn because of faith in you. Fill them with your love, so they may share it and be a blessing to those around them.
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

This world is filled with trouble; yet you have overcome the world and defeated the powers of sin, evil, and death. We pray for our world; for its leaders; for all people, especially those who are most burdened by the sorrows and horrors of war, poverty, hatred, abuse, disease and despair. Bestow your Holy Spirit upon us all: the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord; and most of all, the Spirit of joy in your presence.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant healing and hope to all who suffer in body, mind or spirit, especially Dolores Rodela, Mary Ann Helmricks, Claire Littlefield, Amy Cooper, Curt Behrens, Pr. David Andreae, and Pr. James Puotyual. Be gracious and merciful to them, and to all who care for them. Restore the bonds of fellowship and affection that have been strained or sundered by suffering and adversity; and give to us all the joy of your saving help.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus Christ, you have overcome the world, the devil, and our sins. Thank you for delivering our beloved dead from those powers, especially Verle Pugh and Pr. David Steffenson. Let the fullness of your joy touch and heal hearts still shadowed by grief. Help us all to live in faith and hope, love and kindness, gentleness and peace, self-control and patience. Give us a foretaste of that joy that you promise forever to all whom you love.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**