



## 'Resurrection Impact: Dreamin' God's Mission'

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
8:30 & 10:45 am, May 1, 2016  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton  
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Acts 16:9-15](#); [Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5](#); [John 14:23-29](#)

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

I'm not looking forward to the detour. I'm referring to the 3-month-long road construction set to begin tomorrow on Route 15, which will prevent us from traveling a particular short stretch just south of Marysville. There will be the roundabout detours taking a person across the George Wade Bridge and up 22/322, or through Perry County via 274. There is also supposedly a local route along the river that ultimately weaves its way through what is known as the Marysville Subway. But, shhhhh, that's a local secret.

The folks I really should feel sorry for are those who must regularly take Route 15, and the businesses in Marysville which will be impacted. I only need to worry about a few journeys, such as heading to Penn State next weekend for my son's upcoming graduation, and any summer appointments to our dentist in Marysville. Small potatoes in the big scheme of things.

But I still am not fond of detours. My math skills aren't the greatest, but I do understand that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. I like straight lines. Not just geographically, but in any endeavor of mine. I prefer seeing the goal and having a straight shot to get there. A detour throws me off, makes me think I've lost precious time, and seems unproductive and even contrary to the task and purpose at hand.

But you know what? When you dream God's mission for you, you better be prepared for a few detours. For changes in the plan. For the absence of a straight line. And quite possibly the opportunity to follow God onto paths you could not even imagine.

Just ask Paul. Previous to today's lesson from the book of Acts, Paul had begun a second missionary journey to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. After having been converted to Christianity through a dramatic experience with Christ, Paul went on his first journey, which took him to some areas in Asia Minor. Then Paul decided he should make his way further into Asia. He attempted to head north and east, taking the Gospel to places such as Phrygia and Galatia. He then tried to go to the region of Bithynia and turn further east from there. That's his goal. That's his plan. Not exactly a straight line, but a course that made perfect sense to Paul, was doable given his modest means of income, and considering he's going there with the best of intentions—to draw people to Christ—well, you would think his route would have had God's seal of approval. (Note to readers: A helpful map of Paul's second missionary journey can be found at this site.

<http://www.biblestudy.org/maps/apostle-paul-second-missionary-journey-large-map.jpg>.)

But no. In the verses just prior to today's verses, we read this: "They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas." (Acts 16:6-8)

The Holy Spirit set up one roadblock after another. As Professor Brian Peterson puts it, "Paul appears backed into a coastal corner at Troas by God's strange and repeated 'no.'"

And so we find Paul at this moment in time in today's lesson with God forcing him onto a detour road. Going west wasn't part of Paul's original goal. Journeying to another continent was certainly not Paul's plan. Yet, not only was Paul prevented from heading east to evangelize; he was also given a vision. In this vision he sees a man in Macedonia—one continent over—calling to him for help.

That's when it finally kicks in for Paul, and he understands why his eastward-journey attempts have been thwarted. He's just dreamt God's mission for him, and for the story of Jesus. And who is Paul to go against God's leading? Even if it takes him in surprising directions?

We can look back at this journey and see how it was a major turning point for the growth of Christianity, because now Europe is the place where the event of Christ crucified and risen is being made known to all. (And if you take a look at Paul's third missionary journey, it expands even further into Europe.) Don't suppose these journeys were easy. These were difficult journeys, and when you read Paul's letters, you realize it. He faced stubborn and recalcitrant congregations. He endured imprisonment. He was the butt of criticism and rebuke from many corners of the church.

Yet I cannot imagine a Bible that did not contain Paul's words that have deepened the faith and guided the footsteps of so many generations of Christians. Words like "Love is patient, love is kind..." and "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." These words were penned and sent to those earliest congregations in Corinth and Philippi on that new continent, and they ring in our ears today.

God had a goal and a plan, and Paul followed. God's vision of what needed to happen to draw more people to him was quite a different plan from Paul's—much larger, much more expansive. And even though Paul initially couldn't understand or grasp that vision, maybe didn't even want to embrace that mission, Paul was still an instrument of God to fulfill it. That's the greatest wonder of it all! That we who least want to take the detour will be invited, maybe even compelled, to journey on it, and we will be strengthened by and for it.

When Paul headed west, and stepped onto a new continent, he found opportunity to preach and teach, and lives were changed. Not just one lone woman named Lydia, and her household, were brought to faith. But an entire community of folks were gathered and formed in the city of Philippi, and generation upon generation of Christ-followers were born. That's what God's mission was about. How good that Paul listened, discerned, and went.

I said I am not all that fond of detours. But if we look at Paul's experience, we discover that sometimes in the detour, good and necessary things can happen. Think of situations where you were absolutely certain of the path to take to reach the result you wanted. And then consider how detours, obstacles, and time delays, were in some cases the very things that actually improved the final result.

I often read a blog by Pastor Janet Hunt, and her most recent one described how she was frustrated that in her busy calendar, she had agreed to meet with the local chief of police in the town in which her congregation is located. He wanted to speak with her about a possible chaplaincy program that would help those serving as police officers, and the community being served. All well and good, but Pastor Janet was weary and wary, knowing he would ask for her help, and meanwhile, she was busy thinking she could not take on one more task.

This is what Pastor Janet experienced in her 45-minute conversation (not a very long detour): First, she learned some things about the community that she never knew before—and these were important things to know in the context of her ministry. Second, she heard stories about people in the area who were for all intents and purposes “invisible” but struggling with daily needs. Third, she was made aware of the pressures faced by those carrying the badge. And finally, she discovered there was a cry for help in many corners.

At the end of that meeting, she recognized there could indeed be ways for the Church to be part of the community in new forms of ministry. And while she could not yet fully predict how her congregation might be involved, she knew it was important to go back to her parishioners and start talking about it. The detour, taken reluctantly, had proven to be meaningful.

See, I think Pastor Janet's experience reflects Paul's experience, and can be quite a common experience for us all—when we accept and embrace the detour. Whether it is our discerning together the future direction of Trinity Lutheran Church, and how our mission here on the West Shore can better reflect God's dream for us....or whether it is our individual discernment of our individual lives, and how my daily journey and your daily journey can better reflect God's dream for each of us....that discernment may best happen, surprisingly, when we've found ourselves on the detour. This isn't precious time lost, though I admit that might be our first thought. Instead, maybe this is precious time gained. Maybe there is something needful about our being present in a new place, a place we hadn't planned to go, and present with people we hadn't planned to meet. Maybe there are gifts yet to be called forth from us that we had no idea even existed in us. Maybe our focus needs to be diverted from the path we—and our egos—are so determined to follow, and instead refocused on God's promises and plans. Maybe the Spirit is opening our hearts, and we will see that the detour, taken reluctantly, will prove meaningful. **AMEN.**

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