



## “Resurrection Impact: Dreamin’ God’s Mission”

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
5:30 pm Saturday, April 30, 2016  
The Reverend John H. Brock  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 16:9-15; John 14:23-29

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

Our first lesson starts out, not deliberately being deceiving, but it makes it sound like Paul said “Oh, yeah, let’s go do that!” And that wasn’t quite the case.

If you’ve been paying attention to our readings from Acts (our primary reading for the first lesson throughout the season of Easter), you will hopefully remember the story of the guy named Saul who, way back in chapter 7, was condoning the persecution of the followers of Christ. You may also remember, as well, the story we heard about his encounter with Christ along the road to Damascus, and, more importantly, his subsequent conversion to, and preaching of, the gospel of Christ.

In the intervening chapters that lead us up to our lesson tonight, first, Saul becomes known as Paul. That happened in chapter 13, with this “detailed” explanation:

*<sup>9</sup> But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him (Acts 13:9 NRS);*

Second, he teams up for a while with a fellow named Barnabas (and occasionally a physician named Luke) (yes, Luke as in “Gospel of Luke” Luke) (which also happens in chapter 13).

But mostly, Paul spends his time going to *synagogues*, preaching Christ and bringing The Message to his fellow Jews. Sometimes, Gentiles would also hear The Message and believe. But to Paul, Gentiles were really more of a “bonus,” more like “collateral believers,” so to speak, rather than the end goal. Until, that is, our lesson.

Unfortunately, our reading leaves out the few verses leading up to our reading. Allow me:

*<sup>6</sup> They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.<sup>7</sup> When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them;<sup>8</sup> so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. (Acts 16:6-8 NRS)*

Did you catch that? Paul tries to go to Phrygia, Galatia, Bithynia, Mysia, and then into Asia. And they were “Forbidden by the Holy Spirit” and “Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.” Kind of like, God didn’t want him going that direction.

We can kind of understand why Paul wants to go to Asia. He grew up in Tarsus, which is in modern day Turkey. And if you were to look at a map of Turkey, you would see that Turkey is pretty much right next door to Asia Minor. That's where several of these places - Phrygia, Galatia, & Bithynia - are. Greece (or as our reading put it, Macedonia) however, is on the other side the Aegean Sea, several hundred miles east of where Paul was *wanting* to go.

Another thing about Turkey, Asia, and Greece? There were **lots** of Jewish believers in Turkey and Asia. Greece, on the other hand, was full of, well, Greeks. That is, Gentiles. In a couple of his letters, Paul goes out of his way to point out that he is a 'Jew among Jews'; a Jew born and raised; a fulfiller of the law. When it comes to Jewishness, Paul is the *creme 'de la creme*. So to whom is it that he ends up getting called to serve, but Gentiles? Can you say "irony"?

This first major encounter Paul has in Macedonia (which is what that entire area was called in the 1<sup>st</sup> century) is with a woman named Lydia. We get a lot of information packed into verse 14:

*<sup>14</sup> A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.*

Lydia is someone who, even before she meets Paul, already worships God. She is like Cornelius, the Roman centurion who we learned about a few weeks ago in the story about Peter and his vision of food. Lydia is a *Gentile* who knows of and worship the Lord God.

We also learn she's a dealer in purple cloth. Purple dye is expensive to make (it's very labor intensive), so any cloth dyed purple is going to be expensive as well. Which means, Lydia is a good, successful, probably wealthy, business woman. God has prepared her to hear the message that Paul brings her. And how does Paul do, bringing her this message?

*<sup>15</sup> When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.*

So we've got at least a couple of things going on here. On the one hand, we've got an entire household being baptized; entire household implies people of all age, which presumably includes children and infants. So those who complain about those younger folk being baptized need to know their scripture better.

This passage also shows us that women were involved in the ministry of the early church, because here we have Lydia providing room and board while Paul and gang stayed in town.

But this passage also brings about the beginning Paul's ministry *specifically* to Gentiles. From this point on in the book of Acts, Paul pretty much brings the message, not to the synagogues, not to his fellow Jews, but he brings this message of Christ's grace and love and forgiveness to the public market places and temples, where people of faith,

but not necessarily Jewish faith, would be gathering discussing, and conversing.

Paul wanted to do one thing: to bring the gospel to the Jewish believers in Asia. God wanted Paul to do something different: bring the message to Gentiles of all backgrounds, starting in Greece.

One of the points here is that we need to remember that **God will use us**, regardless of whether we want to be used or not. God will send us where God knows we will best serve, whether we are interested in going there or not. God will use us for the good of the gospel where ever we are even if where we are is not where God is wanting us to go.

**God calls each of us to ministry.** God calls each of us to service. That doesn't mean we are all called to be pastors. Each of us have been given ways in which we can serve the Lord. What is it that you want to do in service of Christ? What is it that you think God may be calling you to do?

Something else about this passage: Did you notice, **Paul is not in ministry alone.** He had Barnabas with him. He was supported locally by Lydia. We are not necessarily called to do ministry all by ourselves. Paul had a support system.

And while we don't get this in our passage, some other things that Paul does concerning his ministry: **Paul prays.** He prays about this ministry; he prays about where God wanted him to go; and he prays about what God wanted him to do. And it turned out, what he thought God wanted him to do was **not** where God lead him.

So let's turn this around, try to bring it close to home. Here at Trinity, we are looking at the ministries that we do, the outreach we take part in, how our building is used, by whom, and for what purposes. The staff, the council, lots of different members brought together specifically to talk about these issues, and even a congregational survey done last year, we have been striving to determine a better understanding of living out our Vision, Mission and Values. We, the leadership at Trinity, want to help the congregation serve Christ.

So what does that mean? What are the dreams, what are the visions, that we have, to bring us as a whole to serve Christ? Some of those are getting folks more involved, like what we were striving to accomplish with the service fair a few weeks ago. Some of that is looking at our ministries: are we reaching the people we want to reach? Are we helping those whom we feel others are not?

A part of this is as well is our physical plant, our building and grounds. Do they currently meet our needs and uses? What can be different to better meet the way we worship the way we minister, the way we reach out to the community and the congregation. Over the next several months, we will continue to address those questions.

We want to - I want to - hear your dreams, learn about your visions, to help you to be able to respond, like Paul, so that together we can go and serve God where God is calling us.

Amen.

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