



“Resurrection Impact: Dreamin’ God’s Mission”

Sixth Sunday of Easter
8:15 & 11:00 a.m., Sunday, May 1, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 16:9-15; Revelation 21:10, 22–22:5; John 14:23-29

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

In college I was a history major, and what always intrigued me about history is how there could be just a couple things that are different. Maybe it's a time or a person or a situation, just one thing different or out of place and it could change the whole course of history. Think about it.

A couple decades ago there was a young man named Steve Jobs working in his parent's garage. Imagine all of the things that had to work just right for us to have Apple Computer. Or what if there was a different general during World War II when the Battle of the Bulge began and George Patton wasn't the American General who moved his army, pivoted in a completely different direction to engage the enemy and for us to win that battle. And what would South Africa look like today if a man who had been in jail for twenty-six years, Nelson Mandela, didn't emerge from that prison with forgiveness and reconciliation on his heart and mind. That situation would have turned out incredibly different.

That happens in history. A hundred years before the Reformation there were two individuals where things ended up very different. One was a preacher in Prague, Jan Hus. He spoke of the need of the church to have reformation and reform and the church reacted by burning him at the stake. A contemporary of his, Francis of Assisi, also spoke for the need of reform and today he is probably one of the most beloved saints in the church in both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant traditions.

But both of them laid the ground work for Martin Luther, the right man, the right time, and the right place to begin a reformed movement in the church catholic that changed the course of Christianity today. How many more moments in history are on the razor's edge with one factor or another to change them and to change us? These were people of vision and inspiration. These were people who dreamed dreams and combined with hard work and focus were able to discern how their life was to be. They dreamed big dreams and the world was never the same because of it.

The Book of Proverbs says where there is no vision, the people perish, and we've seen that again and again when we stop paying attention to our dreams and where God might be leading us.

Paul was at a crossroads of his ministry. He had been ministering in what we know as the Middle East and Turkey, all of those places are on the continent of Asia. His intention was to continue to minister to the growing congregations in Turkey, but Paul tells us in the Book of Acts that the Spirit didn't allow him to go where he wanted to go. Instead the Spirit was taking him someplace else. Luke tells us that he has a vision, and in the vision he sees a man from an area across the sea in Macedonia, just North of Greece. It's an area that Paul hadn't even considered to go, and yet God through this vision calls him to something new. He has him go in a different direction completely. As he's in Turkey he's thinking about going East and in this vision from God he is called to go West from one continent to another.

Now it is important to know something about New Testament geography, Philippi was known for its agriculture. It was also a commercial hub in a strategic location that had both sea and land routes. It had functioning gold mines and its status was that of a Roman colony with a lot of retired Roman centurions or soldiers making up its populous. It also had a famous school of medicine with graduates that were known throughout the world. Notice that in the Acts passage, Luke who is writing the story and who is himself a physician includes himself in the narrative. Before he was talking about Paul and now he talks about we went over to Macedonia.

This is an important passage in the history of the church and Luke devotes more space to the mission in Philippi than he does to any other city on Paul's missionary journeys, even though they didn't spend a lot of time there. It is an important story; it is a pivotal story in Christian history. Paul's practice was to go to the local synagogue to set up a support base, but there is a problem with Philippi, there is no synagogue. And so in time he hears that people are gathering down by a place of water, perhaps a stream or a river. There Paul meets Lydia, Lydia from the upper middle class. She's a merchant in purple dye, a very expensive dye at the time. We hear from Luke that she is a god-fearing. She is a Gentile and yet she is trying to keep the Jewish law. She is open to the teachings of Judaism and she is trying to learn more about it. The conversation that Paul has with her is quite simple, but it has a major impact. Luke says, "*The Lord opened up her heart to listen.*" Lydia opens herself up and seeks the Lord and the Lord seeks after her. You might say that Lydia opened herself up to the dream to the vision that Paul had to travel to her area. As a result, her whole household was baptized. And this influencer became an influencer of others.

But recognize in this simple story is a major turning point in history. Christian evangelization goes West into Europe and the world would never be the same. And it all began with a dream and a simple call to go to an unknown place, a place that Paul didn't even want to go to.

A Christian's response to God's call is never an inconsequential thing. The world can change because of it. And it's important for the church to reflect on how God might be speaking to us, the dreams and the visions that he might be placing on our hearts in this congregation. For congregations always have a choice whether to maintain the status quo or to be challenged by a new vision, a new dream of mission and ministry.

Deep down within us I believe there is a desire to make a difference in the world, to make our lives count. Dreams and visions help give us meaning and inspire us to something greater. Big dreams inspire and energize and focus the church and shows a congregation God's preferred future for it and its place in God's world. It's not without growing pains, however.

Paul faced a lot of opposition throughout his ministry, and yet we know there is no one's words who inspired more in the church than perhaps Jesus, than the words of Paul in the New Testament. And so brothers and sisters, I invite you to listen to the Spirit, to dream God's bold dreams for your life and for the life of our congregation. Dream a worthwhile dream and be willing to take a risk for God's mission in the world, because if we do, it will have a kingdom impact. So let us dedicate ourselves, let us focus on what God is calling on us to be and to do and let us celebrate our God who invites us to dream big dreams and calls us into mission. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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