



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup

April 28, 2024
Acts 16:6-15

Community

TODAY'S THEME

Clearly led by the Holy Spirit, the apostles find themselves compelled once again to tell their transformational story of Jesus Christ. Paul has a vision of a “man in Macedonia.”

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

God can be trusted to direct our steps, even when it seems to us that the train has come off the track. Trusting God's direction breathes peace into our lives, and often leads us to God's purposes in ways we could never imagine, or perhaps never even see.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

Choose to trust God more. Learn to hold our agenda loosely.

ICEBREAKER

Everybody has plans. Many of us use organizers, calendars, and electronic gadgets to organize these plans. How do you organize your plans? Share one thing that you are currently planning. When have your plans changed beyond your control? How did you see God at work in that circumstance?

PRAY TOGETHER

Lord God, give us a vision of the purpose you have for us. By your Holy Spirit, guide us and give us direction that connects us to deeper trust in you and greater peace in every day. When our pathways veer in unexpected directions that are difficult or painful, help us to trust you to provide all that we may need. Shape our hearts and minds to be used for your plans and purposes. Amen.

Content

Chapter 15 is a significant point of transition in Acts. The Council of Jerusalem meets and not only opens the doors for the gospel to be proclaimed to Gentiles, but also helps the early church move away from obedience to the Mosaic law. Following this account is the division that develops between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. As Paul and Silas go one way and Barnabas and John Mark go another, the mission expands further. At the beginning of chapter 16 we're introduced to Timothy, who joins Paul and Silas in their mission to teach the decisions of the Jerusalem Council.

Paul's second missionary journey is marked by God's guidance. Luke implies that Paul intended to travel into Asia (the western part of what is today known as Asia Minor) but was “forbidden by the Holy Spirit.” How did the apostles know the will of the Spirit? We're not told. It might have come through prayer or through circumstances. We're left to wonder why God would want to prevent the word from being proclaimed anywhere, but Luke wants us to know that God's agenda prevails, as does God's timing.

Again, Paul intended to travel further north into Bithynia, but “the Spirit of Jesus” did not allow it and the apostles spent some time in Troas. While in Troas, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia who pleaded with Paul to come to Macedonia and “help” them. The apostles were convinced that this vision was God's way of calling them to Macedonia, and they moved in that direction. Notice the presence of all three persons of the Trinity directing the apostles along this journey! Read Acts 16:6-15.

DISCUSSION

God twice blocked the door on Paul's travel plans. How did Paul know it was God who changed his plans? Couldn't it have been coincidence, or difficult circumstances? How do we know that God changes our plans today? Talk about how a “closed door” directed you to a new pathway.

Macedonia (now northern Greece) was a significant Roman colony. Philippi was the leading city and major sea port. Paul and his travel companions stayed in Philippi for “some days,” probably because of the potential significance of this city for the spread of the gospel. Notice that, in verse 12, Luke shifts to the “we” pronoun, his subtle way of letting us know that he has now joined the mission.

Inscribed on the arches outside the city of Philippi was a prohibition against bringing an unrecognized religion into the city. Ten Jewish males were necessary to establish a synagogue, and it appears there was no synagogue in Philippi. Jews typically gathered by rivers for prayer when a local synagogue was not available. Paul and his companions supposed that some people might gather by the Gangites River, a mile or so west of the city. They found some women there who had gathered for prayer.

DISCUSSION

The apostles thought they'd go to the synagogue to teach, but their plans were changed again. What changed their plans? What do you think is the significance of going “down to the river to pray?”

Luke's account focuses on Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, which was a valuable and expensive material often worn as a sign of nobility or royalty. Lydia may have been a wealthy businesswoman. She was obviously a person of means, since she had guest rooms (16:15) and servants. Greek women of Lydia's day had elevated status and were able to conduct business and hold honorary public titles. Thyatira was a city known for its commerce, so Lydia may have brought her business to Philippi from there.

Lydia was a worshiper of God, and an example of a Gentile who was not an official proselyte to Judaism, but who did worship the God of Abraham. As a gift of grace, the Lord "opened her heart" to hear and receive the gospel as Paul proclaimed it. She and her entire household were baptized. Afterward, she urged the apostles to be guests in her home.

DISCUSSION

Why do you think it was important for Paul and his companions to run into Lydia and her household? What role might Lydia have played in the future ministry of Paul and his companions?

GOING DEEPER

In Acts, God leads Paul and the apostles in many and various ways. Here is a list of just some of the ways that God leads:

- Direct revelation (1:4-5, 11; 8:29; 10:19; 13:2; 16:6-7; 20:23)
- Scripture (1:20)
- The casting of lots (1:23-26)
- Unexpected, supernatural acts (2:1-41)
- The apostles' teaching (2:42)
- Judgment (5:1-11)
- Church "growing pains" (6:1-7)
- Persecution and evil opposition (7:54-8:1; 14:5-7; 20:3)
- Angelic messengers (8:26; 10:3-8; 27:22-26)
- Miraculous relocation (8:39)
- Direct, life-altering encounters with the risen Lord (9:3-9)
- Visions (9:10; 10:3-8, 9-16; 11:6; 16:9-10; 18:9-11; 23:11)
- Human instruments/messengers (9:17-19, 27-28)
- Times of intense prayer (10:9; 13:2)
- Bringing to their minds the words of the Lord (11:16)
- Prophetic utterances (11:28; 21:4, 10-12)
- God-honoring, Spirit-led discussions among church leaders (15:1-31)
- Promptings by the Spirit (15:28; 19:21; 20:22)
- Closed doors (16:6-7)
- Favorable circumstances (19:8-11)
- Civil/legal/political rights (25:10-12)

(List taken from "Life Application Commentary: Acts.")

DISCUSSION

Have you ever been led by God through one of these ways? Pick one and explain. How is it that God can lead through pain, difficulty, and negative circumstances? Does this bother you at all? In the plans you are currently making, what will you look for from God in terms of direction?

Application

This week, how can we choose to trust God more? This week, how can we learn to hold our agenda loosely? How will both of these behaviors change what we do in regard to stewardship, giving, generosity, and financial healing?

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you are drawing us into the future in which you are already at work. Help us to trust you with our plans and to hold them loosely, knowing they may change as we get more in touch with your purposes. Help us to focus on your agenda of reconciliation, redemption, and serving others. Fill our hearts with mercy, justice and peace. We want to trust you and your goodness more each day. Work in us and work through us this week. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Evangelism: A Burning Enthusiasm

ACTS 18:25

Apollos was a Christ-follower who was known for many things. He was eloquent, well versed in scripture, had been trained in the way of the Lord, and taught accurately. But his most enduring characteristic was that he spoke with "burning enthusiasm." How would your relationship with Christ be characterized by others? Are you able to tell your faith story to one other person this week?

Acts 16:6-15 NLT Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. (7) Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. (8) So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas. (9) That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (10) So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there. (11) We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. (12) From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days. (13) On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. (14) One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. (15) She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed.