

You Must Be Dreaming
May 26, 2019
[Scripture Focus: Acts 16: 9 - 15]

SCRIPTURE

Let's take a closer look at the text from Acts 16. This morning, I'll be reading from The Message...

That night Paul had a dream: A Macedonian stood on the far shore and called across the sea, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" The dream gave Paul his map. We went to work at once getting things ready to cross over to Macedonia. All the pieces had come together. We knew now for sure that God had called us to preach the good news to the Europeans.

Putting out from the harbor at Troas, we made a straight run for Samothrace. The next day we tied up at New City and walked from there to Philippi, the main city in that part of Macedonia and, even more importantly, a Roman colony. We lingered there several days.

On the Sabbath, we left the city and went down along the river where we had heard there was to be a prayer meeting. We took our place with the women who had gathered there and talked with them. One woman, Lydia, was from Thyatira and a dealer in expensive textiles, known to be a God-fearing woman. As she listened with intensity to what was being said, the Master gave her a trusting heart—and she believed!

After she was baptized, along with everyone in her household, she said in a surge of hospitality, "If you're confident that I'm in this with you and believe in the Master truly, come home with me and be my guests." We hesitated, but she wouldn't take no for an answer.

Some background on this text: The Acts of the Apostles and Luke's Gospel are thought to be written by the same person (Luke) between 64 and 72 A. D. History tells us that Luke died shortly after Paul was executed. Acts ends with Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

His two years spent there gave Luke sufficient time to do his research to determine what happened as the gospel was preached throughout the Roman Empire.

Acts is quite short and only gives a brief account of what happened following the ascension of Christ and the beginning of the church at Pentecost. Luke's writings were limited largely to the ministries of Peter and Paul.

My Harper NRSV study Bible reminds readers that the ultimate author of all scripture is the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who selected and used the writers so that they are trustworthy, dependable and factual. Luke gathered info from Silas, Titus, Timothy, Apollos, John Mark and Barnabas.

While Luke's core messages often included claims that Christ fulfilled scripture by dying for the sins of his people and rising again; and He was exalted in Heaven at the throne of his father. This is the Lord; the Messiah for Jews and Gentiles alike. Folks were urged to repent, accept Christ by faith, be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Luke also strongly emphasizes the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles comes to a conclusion at a time when the Roman Empire has been evangelized, churches have been established, elders and deacons selected and the basic order of the church had been established. That's the background. Now, on to this week's text that you heard earlier.

The Holy Spirit closed the door twice as Paul tried to determine where to go next. Then, in a dream, Paul "saw" definite directions. Paul and his companions had their route. Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit not only guides us to the right places, it also keeps us from going to the wrong places. As we seek God's will, it's important to know what God wants us to do and where he wants us to go.

It's equally important to know what God doesn't want us to do and to identify the places that we're not supposed to go.

In verse 10 (**We went to work at once getting things ready to cross over to Macedonia. All the pieces had come together. We knew now for sure that God had called us to preach the good news to the Europeans.**), the use of the word "us" indicates that Luke likely joined Paul, Silas and Timothy on their journey. Luke, the author of Acts, was an eye witness to what happened.

In verse 13 (**On the Sabbath, we left the city and went down along the river where we had heard there was to be a prayer meeting.**). They left the city because there was a message inscribed on the arches outside of the city of Philippi stating a prohibition against anyone bringing an unrecognized religion into the city. So, the prayer meeting had to take place outside of the city.

It's in verse 14 that we hear about Lydia, who was an influential merchant specializing in purple cloth (which was valuable, expensive and often worn as a sign of royalty or nobility);

Lydia heard Paul preach and then believed. Ultimately, this opened the way for ministry in that region and was another instance of God working in and through women. All this because of a dream...

SO WHAT?

Think about it... It was because of a dream that Paul embarked on a journey where Lydia took a brand new look at her faith. I wonder how often it is that we stay frozen in place instead of leaving our comfort zones, taking a chance and responding to Christ's call to make a difference in the world.

For the last several months, at Kirk Night and at Soup & Rolls (during Lent), we've been studying God's call on our lives and how difficult it is for us to respond. We've been using *Radical* by David Platt and *Unfinished* by Rich Stearns, former CEO of World Vision.

Here we are, a group of Christians who weekly affirm our faith in the Triune God during worship, living lives where we try to follow Christ but often find it impossible to do what we're called to do.

We read this clear message of judgement in Matthew 25 where we're held accountable for essentially not helping those in need: **When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'**

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

We hear the words and occasionally reach out, but most often... we conjure up an excuse for not responding. I mean "We're really busy, right?"

I used to think that busy-ness was an affliction only of young people but now I look around and see that our seniors (those who are retired) are so busy!

Now, EVERYONE is busy. Whether you are 6 or 60 or even older, it's like there's no spare time to reach out... I mean there's time for parties and movies and concerts and a zillion other things but we usually can't find the time to respond to Christ's call because we're too busy. So, now what?

NOW WHAT?

Let me share some mind-numbing statistics with you:

- One in eight people in the world go hungry every day.
- Every 10 seconds a child dies from a hunger-related cause.
- Globally, hunger and malnutrition are more of a risk to folk's health than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.
- Americans spend \$20 billion annually on soft drinks. This is enough to eradicate water and sanitation problems throughout the world for two years.

- The total income of American churchgoers is \$6.5 trillion. ON THE AVERAGE, they give away 2.3% of their income to help others but spend \$897 billion on personal entertainment (like movies); \$67 billion on their pets; \$25 billion on the lottery and \$10 million on elective cosmetic surgery. So, could we afford to do more?
- If American churchgoers tithed (gave 10% of their income to the church), churches would raise enough money to end extreme worldwide hunger, eliminate malaria, cut in half the number of people who have no clean water or sanitation. So, tick tock. What are we waiting for? The judgement of Matthew 25?

We've got to think past our paranoia and small ideas. We need to dream big and not be concerned when we have a radical idea to improve the world that may cause someone to say "You must be dreaming."

We read today's text and hear that Paul had a dream that God was calling him to a specific destination. Paul followed God's call and Lydia's household was ultimately baptized becoming followers of the Lord.

So, what about us? What does today's lesson mean for us? I believe that there are several important takeaways for us. First, I'm not sure what I think about dream interpretation. It's one thing for a dream interpretation specialist to explain what they think a dream may mean. Maybe I should have seen an interpreter so that I could understand my recurring hit-by-a-bus dream...

But it's another thing entirely to listen for God - whether His message comes in a dream, through the wisdom of a friend or family member or just by being in the silence of nature and really listening for God's voice. Maybe the first step for many of us is to just be still and listen (for a change). While we may never hear God's personal voice coming from the clouds, we may hear another form of message from God by simply being quiet and listening. Just stop talking for a minute.

I believe that many of us are challenged by our own paranoia. We don't want someone to take advantage of us. If we see a person holding a "homeless" sign at an intersection, how do we know that they're really homeless? They might be faking it! Lord forbid that we'd give a blessing bag to someone who wasn't really homeless!

Think about it: Our desire to NOT be taken advantage of could actually prevent us from ever reaching out to anyone (including those who are really in need but don't look the part). Remember Matthew 25?

I've reached the point in my life that when someone asks for help I no longer waste time wondering whether their need is real. I mean... What's the worst thing that happens when you give a blessing bag to someone who actually has a home?

I'm not sure but I don't think that Jesus would put us in the "goat" line because we tried to help someone who had deceived us. According to scripture, one may actually end up with the goats if they don't respond!

Bottom line: I have talked to many of you who have a dream about ways that you might reach out to those in need. Maybe your dream seems too big to be possible. Maybe your dream was to open an orphanage in a foreign country but you just didn't think it possible.

My advice: Dream big! Go for it! You're not in this by yourself. Remember, Paul had a dream that may have seemed unrealistic. If he hadn't followed his dream; if someone had said "You must be dreaming..." then Lydia would never have heard the Gospel message that changed her life.

If you don't follow your dreams, in response to what you hear God calling you to do, you may never respond to God's call on your life to help others. Don't be afraid. Just trust.

In our lives, we make decisions to do things all of the time. Often, these decisions have nothing to do with following God and everything to do with fulfilling our own desires. Instead of doing what you want to do, think about making time to listen for God. Then, don't be afraid to respond to God's call on your life. Thanks be to God that He calls on us. Amen.