



Christ United Methodist Church

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Date: May 26, 2019

Sermon: Going Out of Our Way

Text: Acts 16:9-15

Speaker: Pastor Don Archer

I mentioned to you last Sunday that the Book of Acts is an interesting and honest look at the work of the early church. One of the main characters in this book, is this person, Paul. Paul who used to Saul of Tarsus before he had a dramatic encounter with the risen Lord. Now, Paul is working to convert others to this new movement of God, that would later be known as Christianity. Paul wants to convert everybody and he is willing to go anywhere, do anything, say anything, endure anything to achieve this goal.

Today's text begins with a vision. Paul had a vision, seeing a man from Macedonia, calling to him: *Come over to Macedonia and help us.* Upon seeing this vision, he and a companion, believed to be Luke of The Gospel of Luke fame, immediately set out for Macedonia. Details of their route are included at no extra charge. Eventually they ended up *in Philippi, a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman Colony.*

On the Sabbath Day Paul and Luke went outside the gate, by the river, seeking a place of prayer; there were a group of women gathered there, a predecessor to The United Methodist Women. Perhaps leading the group in morning prayers or some form of devotions, was Lydia. She is one of those women that appears for a few verses in the New Testament and then, sadly, disappears. Lydia is described as a *worshiper of God.* This means that she was a Gentile, in the process of converting to Judaism, but had not yet finished Confirmation Class. She was a businesswoman ... dealing in purple cloth. As Paul began to speak to this group of women, *the Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what Paul was saying.* Something that he said clicked and she had some type of conversion experience ... the details of which we are not given. We are only told that Lydia, and her entire household, were baptized. According to people who know these things, Lydia was the first European convert to Christ. (This little fact was discovered long ago by someone who was knowledgeable of scripture and geography.)

So, those are the details. What does it mean? What did it mean then and what does it mean for us today? It says to me that, contrary to other actions and words of the Apostle Paul, he was willing to share the gospel with anyone/everyone. The church was continuing the work of Jesus by including and involving women in the kingdom of God. Not just including, but depending upon them. It also says that we may be called, as Paul was, to go out of our way to share the gospel with others. I think the writer of Acts, lists the routes that Paul took on his various mission trips, to enforce this idea that a real effort was made to get to where he was needed.

One of the joys of being your pastor for these past several years is to witness how this congregation is willing to see the vision, hear the call, and go where the Holy Spirit leads. To St. Marys Correctional facility to minister to those who are incarcerated through the work of Kairos ministry. A ministry supported through prayer and the baking of dozens of cookies. To address and respond to the plague of human trafficking and the overcrowding of our prisons, through the work of The UMW. Some of you have heard the call to be part of teams that share Holy Communion with folks in nursing homes, through the extended table ministry. Our Tuesday morning sewing group is always busy with projects that provide warmth and compassion for others. After School ministry, First Friday Free Meals, supporting the Food Pantry, a Hospital in Haiti, and various individual expressions of God's love, reveal that we too have heard the Macedonian call to proclaim, through a variety of ways, the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ.

My prayer for you, for Christ Church, is that you will continue to have a vision for others, all others and to share with them, one-on-one, and in other ways, that Jesus died for our sins and that he lives and works within us to show us that God's grace is able to cross bridges, tear down walls, open doors, and make a difference in the world.

I talked with a man this week who told me that he grew up in a town that had a steel mill. This was a time when mills were running around the clock, with several shifts. One of those shifts started at 5:30a.m.! Incredibly, the pastor and some devoted lay people, gathered each morning in the little Methodist church, to offer prayer, and simple time of worship, for the mill workers that wanted to stop by. This worship service was held at 4:45a.m. every morning. 4:45!

The call to share the gospel is rarely easy, or convenient, or the way we would expect or want. In the verses that follow this morning's text, Paul ends up in the slammer.

But when we respond to the call, the vision, we meet people like Lydia. Lydia who after her baptism opened her home to Paul and his companions as a base for their work of sharing Christ with others. It is believed that her home became one of the *house churches* that were so important as gathering places for new believers.

When we respond to the call to go where God leads, we are blessed by the surprising, wonderful, people that we meet. So it has been for me for these past twelve years. To meet and know and learn from, those who have opened their hearts to listen eagerly to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I want to believe that our being together is the work of God's Holy Spirit.

Thank you for being Christ to me/for me.

Amen.