

Theme: God's call to mission

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, you called Saul of Tarsus to spread the good news of your son to the world and St. Paul went where you sent him: may his example inspire us to share your story and of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom we pray. Amen.

I recall the story of a little girl who, when trains were popular transportation, was taking her first train ride with her parents. As night descended, the mother took the girl, who was clearly quite anxious, and placed her on the upper bunk of the sleeper. She told her little one that up there she would be nearer to God and that God would watch over her.

As silence enveloped the young lady she became afraid and called softly, "Mommy, are you there?"

"Yes dear," came the response.

Notice the very first person this little girl wanted reassurance from, to ease her fears, is her mother. Not her big tough father. (I assume she had a big tough father. And you know what assume means.) We have special relationships with our mothers and so we remember them on this day. They are the ones who gave us birth and carried us for nine months, more or less.

I admit that not all mother and child relationships are all sweetness and light. But as Christians who are called and pray that we forgive as we are forgiven, we honor our mothers and do so especially today.

Back to the story: a little later, in a louder voice, the child called, "Daddy, are you there, too?"

Yes dear," was the reply.

After this had been repeated several times one of the passengers sharing their sleeper car finally lost his patience and shouted loudly, "Yes, we're all here, your father, your mother, your brother, and all your aunts and cousins; now settle down and go to sleep!"

There was a moment of silence . . . and then, in hushed tones a little voice asked, “Mommy, was that God?”

God speaks to us in many forms. It could be a passenger on a train sleeper car. It can be someone who makes an insightful comment to us about what gifts we can offer to the world and the church. It can come in a time of silent prayer. It can come in a still, small voice. It can come in a dream. It can come in a vision. In St. Paul’s case, it came in a vision, probably during a dream.

Paul and Silas were joined by Timothy, who became a significant helper in Paul’s missionary activities. Silas was a prophet from the Jerusalem church who joined Paul. They are traveling through what now is Turkey spreading the good news of Jesus.

They are in Troas when Paul has a vision at night. Troas is on the northern Asia Minor coast. At night, a Macedonian pleads with Paul to go to Europe. In the morning, Paul prepares to set sail. Paul and his group are convinced that the Holy Spirit wants them to work in Macedonia. We may not be able to see the Holy Spirit, but we *can* see a man.

Our reading is part of the first of the “we” sections of Acts. Scholars have debated for centuries who is meant by “we.” The general assumption is that Luke is traveling with Paul and so that is why he says “we.” In another sense, “we” is us. We get to travel with Paul to be witnesses of the growth of Christianity.

They arrived on the Macedonian coast and left the boat at Neapolis, the major port city. They went by land to Philippi. Philippi was founded by Mark Antony to settle his veterans. This was a standard practice of the Romans since the time of Gaius Marius. It was Roman military retirement community. It also had the advantage of having a ready manpower base for Rome if it was needed in an emergency. So, when we read Paul’s letter to the Philippians, it is a letter to retired Roman soldiers and others.

When the Sabbath came, they left the city walls behind them and went to a place where they heard would be a Jewish prayer meeting by the river. When they found the place, there were women there, with whom they

engaged in conversation. It is curious that the only Jews who gathered by the river were women. Perhaps, they were married to the Roman soldiers living in Philippi. Since men worship in the synagogue, there were apparently no Jewish men to build a synagogue in Philippi.

Paul and his companions were on a mission. That was to share the good news of Jesus to the Macedonians. The Jewish women of Philippi would not be spared. One of those women was named Lydia. Of the small group of women gathered there, she apparently was the one who took Jesus' story to heart.

It is important to note some things about Lydia. We are told she was a dealer of purple cloth. This is not a throw away line. It means that she was really rich. Purple cloth was worn by royal people, and for the Romans, by people in power. The ingredients to make purple cloth were really expensive. Only very rich people could afford to buy it. Lydia not only would have made a fortune selling the cloth, but it also meant that she personally knew some of the most powerful people in the Roman Empire. Lydia's conversion would be a really big deal. For one thing, Luke remembers to explicitly name her in his writing.

They end up baptizing everyone in her household. We are not told if there are children. There is no mention of a husband. Since she worked, she was likely single and a widow. She may have inherited her husband's business. Her household would be all her servants and slaves. Perhaps not a small number of people. The servants would be able to refuse baptism, but the slaves would not. Of course, the servants would probably convert to keep their jobs.

Lydia prevails upon Paul and his companions to stay at her house. There were probably plenty of guest rooms. This house probably became the first house-church of Philippi. When Paul later writes to them, it will be to the congregation that gathers at this house. I believe that Lydia probably willed her house to the church after her death.

This is the first time that we know of where the young church leaves Asia and goes into Europe. The church is becoming more diverse as it spreads beyond Palestine. Every new convert in every new place changes the church. Each baptized person brings new gifts, values, insights, and wisdom.

And as any systems theory person will say, the system changes – the church changes. This happens on a large scale and it happens on a small scale. This is true for any congregation. Every new member changes this parish. New relationships are formed and new ways of seeing things are evaluated. In the same way, every time a member leaves us, through choice and not out of choice, we change. We lose the gifts and wisdom of that person. We mourn that loss and we rejoice when we welcome someone new.

Lydia changed the church. She is so significant that the story of her conversion is preserved in Acts. None of us will get our names in scripture, but every one of us provides significant effects on Our Saviour and the community.

Paul received a vision of a mission need. Paul responded to this call and this need. This is how the church operates. Charles Caleb Peirce responded to the need of an Anglican presence in El Dorado County. We are heirs of that initial call to mission. But the people who got Our Saviour off the ground 150 years ago did not finish the mission. We follow in their footsteps.

The needs here and elsewhere still require our help. The mission continues. We are transformed and fed for mission by gathering here, in community. The mission of the church is too big for one person. Mr. Peirce did not do it by himself. He helped found a parish to help him. Today we support the United Thank Offering to reach out to people through Episcopal parishes. Next week we will support a project to bring clean water to kids in a village in Burkina Faso. The mission continues.

We now pray: Gracious God and giver of all good gifts, give us the gift of evangelism and the courage to share our spiritual story to further your mission in the world to all manner of people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Text: **Acts 16:9–15** (NRSV)

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

¹¹ We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district^c of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³ On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹

^c Other authorities read *a city of the first district*

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ac 16:9–15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.