

Sermons at Christ Church

Be One Body In Christ, belonging To Each Other.

Easter VI

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The story in the Acts of the Apostles recounts a part of Paul's Second Missionary journey. In a vision, Paul receives an invitation to come over to Macedonia to help. Scripture doesn't necessarily help us to understand the kind of help they needed in Macedonia. What help could they need apart from the reassuring words of the good news of Jesus Christ? Paul accepted the invitation as God's transforming agent.

Prior to the vision, Paul had traveled and preached in Phrygia and Galatia but the Holy Spirit prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia. Again, they came to Mysia and tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. They then passed by Mysia and went to Troas. Much as Paul desired to visit these different cities, the Spirit of Jesus prevented them from doing so.

Paul sees a vision. And in that vision, a man invited him to come to Macedonia. That was enough confirmation of what God was trying to do by preventing him and his companions from going to these different cities where God wasn't calling them to go. It wasn't the case that those people didn't need the good news of Jesus Christ, but God wasn't calling them to go there.

I have a few questions for you this bright Sunday morning, what is the spirit of Jesus inviting you to do? More to the point, what is the spirit of Jesus preventing you from doing? Remember, it isn't the case that others don't need the good news but who is God calling you to share the good news with? Where is God calling you to go and preach the good news? What does God want you to do? Do you see a vision of a man inviting you to come to Macedonia to help?

The one gift about the Holy Spirit is that it doesn't force us to make choices that doesn't align with God's plan or God's will. The Spirit rather invites us, prods us, nudges us and presents itself, often as a stumbling block to our selfish desire to do what we want to do. The spirit leads you on a path away from you, so that you can be on God's path and walk on that path.

Paul was on that path, and so he accepted the invitation he received in the vision and made his way with his companions to Philippi, a leading city in Macedonia. Paul went to the very place where God was calling him to go. That was where God needed him. It wasn't about where he felt needed, it was about where God needed him. Where does God need you? Where?

On the Sabbath Day, the Spirit led Paul and his friends to a place of prayer where he spoke to a group of women including Lydia. To these women, Paul preached the good news of God's saving grace. Paul preached the good news of God's redemption through Jesus Christ. Paul preached the good news that breaks down barriers and sets people free. Paul preached the good news which liberates the broken hearted and restores our relationship with God. Paul preached the good news which heals our wounds and mends our brokenness. Paul preached the good news which offers hope to the hopeless. Paul preached the good news of God's love. And when the women heard the message of God's love, when Lydia heard the message of God's redeeming grace, he requested baptism and invited Paul and his friends to stay with her. See, the good news turn hearts. The good news makes it possible for us to be hospitable-not only to people we know but to people we do not know. The good news creates in us the oasis of God's mercy, compassion and grace.

Oh!! How I wish the message of the psalmist "Let your ways be known upon earth; your saving health among all nations" resonated with all of us, just so like Paul, we can reject our own selfish and myopic paths and embrace the path of selfless love that God lays out for us. Just so we can embrace the good news of God which transforms lives.

This past week has been brutal. For the life of me, I cannot imagine why a young man could do something as heinous as walking into a grocery store and killing people because of how they look. For the life of me, I cannot imagine how a young man could be imprisoned by so much hate for people who don't look like him. I cannot imagine how a young man who should be thinking about prom and who it is that he will be taking to the prom, what he will wear to the prom, whether he's paid his prom fees, and which limousine he would want to ride to the prom be so captured by such hate that he would drive, not to his prom but to another place, four hours away to kill because of hate.

Who is it that said that we do not need help in Macedonia? Who is it that said that Macedonia is so peaceful and quiet? Who is it that said that the people of Macedonia do not need the good news of Jesus Christ because our experts come on TV and tell us how wonderful we are even in our misery?

Who is it that said that there is racial equity in Macedonia? Who is it that said that there is harmony in Macedonia? I look at this young man and I feel sorry. Not for him, because as old as he may be, he is still a kid.

I feel sorry for those who want us to believe that there is something inferior about being Black. I feel sorry for those who want us to believe that they are superior to others because of the color of their skin. I feel sorry for those who pervert young people like this 18 year old kid with such evil. I feel sorry for those who listen to the good news every Sunday but cannot dare to be or act like Lydia and open their homes and hearts to the other. I feel sorry for those who cannot be as hospitable as Lydia-even after they have heard the transformative power of the good news of Christ. We need help in Macedonia.

When we reflect on our individual lives, the ills in our communities and in Buffalo, NY, and our country and even in Ukraine and around the world, it feels like we are in Macedonia-people and communities that are calling for help. Racism is our Macedonia experience. Hatred is our Macedonia experience. Bigotry is our Macedonia experience. Self-righteousness is our Macedonia experience. And the truth is that we don't need a miracle like the resurrection of Jesus Christ to deal with these ills in our lives and our communities.

The kind of help we need in Macedonia is the miracle of a love that is rooted in the promising power of the good news of Jesus Christ. What we need in Macedonia is the miracle of love that is not limited in its understanding of itself because that love is rooted in Christ Jesus. And because that love is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ it embraces the expansiveness of God's creation. What we need in Macedonia is a miracle of love that is not consumed by itself but understands that the good news of Jesus Christ requires of it to love even the unlovable. What we need in Macedonia is a miracle of love that seeks to mend, heal and transform the broken places of all of our lives. What we need in Macedonia is a miracle of love that looks beyond particularities because that love is of Christ, that love is one that hears and bears the good news of God in Christ. What we need in Macedonia is a miracle of love that constantly reminds each of us of the one duty that we owe the other-which is to love. What we need in Macedonia is a miracle of love that honors everyone because everyone bears within himself or herself the divine nature of God-and that is precisely why God can make God's home in you and me.

God cannot make God's home in inanimate objects. God can only make God's home in you and me because we understand what it means to love, we understand what the good news of Christ requires of us, we understand what it means to be God's light in the world, we understand what honors means, we understand what integrity means, we understand what it means to be life-giving.

Like John, when we open our eyes, and open them wide enough, we will see the New Jerusalem that is coming down from heaven. It is not like the Jerusalem of old. It is even not like the Macedonia of old. It is new because nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood. Those who will gather in this New Jerusalem are those who will bring into it the glory and honor of nations.

So, don't ever feel inadequate in your desire to be honorable and to live into God's glory. What you have to do is to listen to the power of God's spirit within you. What you have to do is to be obedient to God's spirit within you. What you have to do is to follow God's spirit with you and God's path for you-it is only then can you be an agent of God's transforming love. Amen.