

Acts 16:6-10

⁶They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, because they were prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they went as far as Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹A vision appeared to Paul during the night. A Macedonian man was standing there, urging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” ¹⁰As soon as he had seen the vision, we immediately made plans to proceed to Macedonia, because we concluded that God had called us to preach the good news to them.

Where God Directs

I.

They were familiar with the Great Commission in which Jesus told his followers to gather disciples from all nations. *Everyone*, no matter what their race or gender or language needs to hear the message that God sent his Son to be the Savior of the world, just as he promised long ago. *Everyone* needs to hear the story of Jesus and his humble birth in Bethlehem to his execution on the cross to his resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven.

Since everyone needs to hear this message of the gospel, the mission team made their plans. The plan was to go to cities, where there are lots of people. It’s easier to find lots of people to share your message with in a place where there *are* lots of people.

Arrangements were made. The passports were in order. Maps were loaded into the GPS, and off they went.

Every time a missionary team is sent out, it is understood that problems can develop. Financial issues may arise to prevent a desired mission trip. Sometimes people living in the target region just are not ready to listen to the gospel, and the efforts of the team produce little to no results. Geopolitical issues can interfere. That’s what is happening right now with the mission efforts that the WELS is associated with in Ukraine.

Despite the odds, despite the challenges, mission teams still are sent out to many parts of the world. Those sending missionaries realize how important it is. Every day people die. Allah and Buddha will not help them; if they die without Jesus, they don’t just perish from this life—they perish eternally.

When Martha wanted her sister Mary to get on with the housework and preparation for a big meal, Jesus told her: “One thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42, EHV). One thing is needed by every person living in a potential mission field—Jesus, and the good news of salvation through what he has done.

Missionaries are often bitterly disappointed when things don’t go as planned. Sometimes they question God. Lord, how could you prevent us from going to this place when it is so clear that there are many, many people dying without Jesus there?

Paul and his companions wanted to go to Asia Minor. They had made plans and loaded their maps for metropolitan areas like Ephesus, Myrna, Pergamum, and Laodicea. These people *needed* to hear the gospel. Do those names sound familiar? They should. They are some of the seven churches John wrote to at the direction of Jesus in Revelation. Paul went

to those places—eventually—in his *third* missionary journey. His plan was to go right *now*!

“They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, because they were prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they went as far as Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” (Acts 16:6-7, EHV). Twice in the same trip Paul was prevented from going to places he *knew* in his heart needed desperately to hear the gospel. He was right about the fact that the people in these places needed to hear the gospel, but God’s plan was for another time. It would come in the future, which was only known to God.

II.

It seems like the height of ignorance for people to try to make demands of God. It is foolish to try to direct God—*this* is where I will go.

Sometimes, however, you don’t know *where* God wants you to go right now, or *what*, exactly, he wants you to do as you live your life as a Christian or as a Christian congregation.

God has given to his church all kinds of gifts and abilities. We seek his direction by making all the logical preparations.

In the case of mission work in far-flung locations, you get the passports, acquire the funds, determine which cities or areas seem to be the logical places to go with the gospel. In the case of an existing congregation, like ours, you look at your current situation and all the challenges and all the blessings we have received from the hand of God, and you boldly create your plans.

It is essential to realize that human plans don’t always fit *God’s* plans. Congregations can be bitterly disappointed when things *don’t* work out as they planned. Teaching staffs or the number of pastors in a congregation gets reduced. Buildings don’t get built. In some places, Lutheran elementary schools close; in others, entire congregations cease to exist.

III.

The fact that things aren’t going according to plan doesn’t necessarily mean there is anything wrong with the plan. Remember, all these places Paul wanted to go right *now* were places he eventually *did* visit. All these places were places where churches were established.

Luke reports in today’s First Reading: “They were prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in the province of Asia. ⁷... They tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” (Acts 16:6-7, EHV). Were their passports refused at the border? How, exactly, did God communicate to his missionaries that they were not to enter this region? Scripture doesn’t say. We are just told, they were prevented; they were not allowed.

“A vision appeared to Paul during the night. A Macedonian man was standing there, urging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us!’” (Acts 16:9, EHV). Help how? Help with what? Whatever their physical needs might have been in Macedonia, we know one thing: their need for the gospel was even greater. Plans needed to be altered immediately. God’s call for them in that moment was to Macedonia.

Do you remember Holy Trinity’s past? We are about to enter the month of June—the month we adopt the budget for the next fiscal year. Every year we have to try to determine how best to manage the resources God has given this congregation and what our plans will be to use them.

Years ago we would wring our hands over how to keep the doors open and the lights on. It was necessary to borrow money from various sources, just to keep things going. For several years that has not been the case. Holy Trinity has the ability to look not just at the

budget for the next fiscal year, but also to things we might do to improve our property and enable this ministry to move forward for the next 50 years.

God has altered our plans. He has blessed us beyond what we could have foreseen.

IV.

“As soon as he had seen the vision, we immediately made plans to proceed to Macedonia, because we concluded that God had called us to preach the good news to them” (Acts 16:10, EHV).

God’s plans never changed. God knew all along where he wanted this missionary team to go at this particular time in history. Paul and his companions had to adjust *their* plans to fit God’s. New maps were obtained. New travel documents were procured. Off they went.

This vision God gave to Paul meant that they would go to places like Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea. Those names are familiar to those who read the book of Acts and Paul’s letters to various churches.

According to God’s plan, these places needed missionaries to come right away. It might not have been the places Paul and the others intended to go, but these were mission fields, none the less. Gospel ministry was accomplished, just as God intended.

In today’s Gospel Jesus prayed for his church of all time. He said: “I am praying not only for them, but also for those who believe in me through their message. ²¹May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:20-21, EHV).

There is so much need for the message about Jesus! Paul and his companions went where God directed them. God prevented him from Asia and Bithynia at this particular time, so he went elsewhere with the gospel, only to return to those places later.

Missionaries are still sent to far-off lands and to other communities within our own country. At the same time, there is a huge mission field right in our own backyard.

This week news reports about a murderer killing school children as well as shooting his own grandmother in Texas grabbed the spotlight. But last week, just a few miles away, in Kentwood, there was a shooting after a highschool graduation.

These events and other criminal activity show us the pervasiveness of sin in our society. Everyone needs to know and lament their sins and seek to be forgiven. There are thousands right here who have ignored the message of the gospel. There are thousands more who have not heard the message of the gospel and need the comfort that Jesus gives of sins that have been paid for.

That’s why we exist right here in this place right now. We have God’s Word in its truth and purity. We seek to share it with others.

Use who you are and what you have as God directs, so that we might continue to reach many more. God bless your mission work. Amen.