

## **A Journey Following the Holy Spirit**

### **Acts 16:6-16**

#### **Map to GPS to Smart Phone**

As you know, I love hiking and traveling. My first trip in the United States was a short trip from Atlanta to Tybee Island, Georgia, during my first spring break in 2009. Although it was a long drive, Juhee and I enjoyed our first trip. [ppt] We went to “The Crab Shack” and [ppt] ate snow crabs and crayfish for the first time. [ppt] We saw some alligators too. I cannot believe that it was fourteen years ago. I know that I should not say this to you, but I sometimes feel that I am getting old. When I took my first trip in 2009, we used a map to find our way. Juhee constantly looked at the map to check that we were on the correct road. A few years later, [ppt] I got a GPS and no longer used a paper map. I just needed to follow the directions on the GPS. A few years later, smartphones came out and since then, I use my cell phone’s GPS. Technology really makes our lives convenient. If I need to visit your house, I just need to put in your address and follow the directions my cell phone indicates. I sometimes wish that following the Holy Spirit was as clear and plain as following my cell phones GPS for driving directions.

Of course, following the lead of the Holy Spirit is completely different than following a GPS. While a GPS helps us to go where we want to go, the Holy Spirit leads us to where God wants us to go. We don’t set our ultimate destination, God does. Also, God does not tell us every detail of what to do or where we should go all the time. Right? I think that following the Holy Spirit is more like reading a map than the GPS. Unlike the GPS, a map does not tell you “turn right or left.” The map shows us where to go but it is our job to find the right path. We have to carefully read the map and our surrounding context as well. We know that God wants us to be holy and Jesus shows us the way to holiness and salvation, but God does not always ring a warning bell when we are about to take a wrong turn. That’s not how God works. God invites us to the way of salvation and waits for us to follow. We need to learn to discern where God calls us to go and practice reading the right path in our life-context.

#### **Paul, an Excellent Follower of the Holy Spirit**

Apostle Paul was an excellent follower of the Holy Spirit. His mind was fully oriented toward the risen Christ, he was able to discern his vision and where God led him to go. Today’s text is a part of an event that happened during his second missionary journey. [PPT] After sowing seeds of faith in many cities during his first mission trip, Paul desired to see the fruit of his labor and so he started his second missionary journey. As Paul and his colleagues traveled, there were some places where the church was growing and its faith was strengthening day by day. There were places where the seed of the gospel had not sprouted and grown. The trials and triumphs, joys and disappointments were mixed on his journey. I believe that many pastors and congregations have had similar experiences, but with the Holy Spirit as their guide, they continue their missionary journey. Paul planned to go to the Asia province, but the Holy Spirit blocked that route. So instead, they went to Mysia and tried to go north to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus wouldn’t let them go there either. God’s plan does not always cohere with our plan.

While traveling, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with him to come and help them. Paul soon realized that God was calling them to proclaim the gospel to the people

of Macedonia and immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia. What caught my attention is the word, 'vision.' Paul saw the vision and followed the vision. The vision that came from God impacted not only on the direction of Paul's missionary journey but the entire church.

Have you ever seen a vision that comes from God? Have you felt that the vision you had, definitely came from God? Since we are living in a scientific age, we are reluctant to talk about visions we may see in the night. If someone comes to me and says, "hey pastor, I saw a vision for the church!," my first reaction would be more of reserve than enthusiastic. Possibly looking for a phone number of a psychiatrist. How many of you think that God still speaks to us through dreams or visions? Even though we may be a little doubtful about dreams and visions, we, Christians, believe that God still speaks to us. Right? Then, how do we hear and discern God's voice from the myriad other voices in our talkative world? Unfortunately, out of their fear of being called erratic or too religious, many Christians close their hearts to the visions that God gives.

First, we must accept that God is still speaking to us. Rev. Dr. Derek Weber, says, "God is always proclaiming. God is always inviting, announcing, encouraging, God is always reaching out with a hope to share in an act of creation. That is the nature of the God we worship, the God we proclaim."<sup>1</sup> What we need today is to acknowledge that God is still speaking to us and we can hear God's voice. Through the act of prayer, reading the Bible, worship, and preaching. God speaks through the smiles of a baby, beautiful spring flowers blooming in the yard, and through the crisp sounds of waves in the ocean. God also speaks through people, people who mourn, and people who are suffering. Because the whole world is the realm of God, God can speak to us at any moment in any place. What we need are hearts open to God. An ordinary moment, can be a sacred moment of seeing a vision that comes from God. Be more mindful of your present moment and open your heart to God to discern God's vision for you and for our church. If you feel that God tells you something about Asbury, please share it with me. I will not judge you but try to see God's calling for us through you!

Sometimes, God leads us in an unexpected direction that we never thought of. And sometimes God's plan does not seem to be what we would like to do. But surely, wonderful things of God always begin with a vision.

### **Ministry is a Teamwork!**

By following the lead of the Holy Spirit, Paul arrived in Philippi, a leading city in the region of East Macedonia. Paul and his friends did not have any connection to this Gentile city. On a sabbath day, they left the city and went down along the river where they had heard there was to be a prayer meeting. They found a group of women including Lydia. Lydia was probably a Gentile convert to Judaism. She was a wealthy business woman dealing in expensive purple fabric. And so Lydia may have been a patron of the Jewish community and had an influential role. As Lydia listened to Paul and his friends, God gave her a trusting heart and she believed. Lydia became a good ministry partner for Paul. Her hospitality and generosity became a seedbed

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/we-are-witnesses/sixth-sunday-of-easter-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/sixth-sunday-of-easter-year-c-preaching-notes>

of the first Christian church in Europe. I am pretty sure that Paul's ministry in Philippi would not have been so successful without the support of Lydia.

Of course, ministry is God's work from the beginning to the end, but it is also true that for successful ministry, committed ministry partners are necessary. Ministry is often equated to those individual persons or things that are visible such as the minister, choir director, or the sacraments. But ministry is made possible by those who are often unseen. Ministry is like playing basketball, not golf. My favorite basketball team was the Chicago Bulls when Michael Jordan was there. (sorry Boston Celtics fans) The Chicago Bulls won the Championship series during the Michael Jordan era. But one-star player cannot make a team win all the time. The Bulls had many other good players like Scottie Pippen and Dennis Rodman. Without good teamwork, no one can win a championship. Right?

Let me ask you a question. Do you think my ministry at Asbury has been effective? Would you recommend me as an effective pastor? (Thank you!) Then, what has made my ministry effective or successful at our church? I can say that it is you, who work hard to build the church together in love. It's not my personal ability, but our love for Christ and the church that enables us to effectively carry out our ministry together at Asbury UMC. It's your hospitality and generosity toward your Korean pastor that have made me feel that I am at home and can do my work without worrying about rejection. It's your weekly commitment to bring flowers for the altar, take care of the church building, and send cards and prayers to those in need. Your willingness to serve during the yard sales, your love and care for one another... all these single acts and every person in our church make our ministry effective. Today's text reminds us of this simple truth, that it takes a team for ministry to be effective. All are co-laborers. Paul was not alone. He was there with Silas, Timothy, Lydia, and many other people who loved Christ dearly. The church is strengthened, then and now, by those who demonstrate their faithfulness in both their words and deeds and by those who extend generous hospitality. Let us continue our good works. But don't just be happy with what we have done. Continue to open your hearts to God and listen to God's plan for us.

Every Sunday morning, we read our Asbury mission statement together. But did you know that we also have a vision statement? [ppt] "We are thankful to God, centered in Christ, and faithful to our Wesleyan tradition. We are committed to seeking the Lord's guidance to do his work. We strive to be a church family where those who enter our doors feel the spirit of God's love, forgiveness and peace." This is an abstract statement and I hope that we can make some actional plans out of our vision statement in the near future. Let us discern God's plan for our beloved Asbury. Expect God's wonderful plan for our church and pray together and work together. God will empower us to realize God's plan for our church. Amen.