

“Guidance From God?”—Acts 16:6-10

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Guidance From God?”, is Acts 16:6-10 → *And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

“Called together by the Holy Spirit Grace Lutheran Church is a loving family of believers growing in Christ through God’s Word and Sacraments and reflecting God’s love by ministering to others and sharing His Word with the community and the nations.” That is Grace Lutheran Church’s Mission Statement.

Over the past forty years or so it seems that every entity has

developed a mission statement in an effort to clarify the direction of their activity. Corporations, small businesses, educational institutions, service agencies, congregations and even the boards and committees within these entities have been encouraged to develop vision and mission statements. A mission statement is supposed to give direction and guide the strategy for fulfilling the purposes for which the organization exists.

Mission statements intrigue me. Isn't the "mission" of corporations and businesses to make money? Isn't the "mission" of hospitals and care facilities to take care of the physical needs of people? Isn't the "mission" of the Christian congregation to bring Christ and His forgiveness of sins to people? The reason for developing a mission statement intrigues me. Maybe a mission statement is meant to bind ourselves to certain characteristics as a congregation so that others will encounter those characteristics in our presence. Maybe a mission statement is intended to ensure that we make things happen a certain way in our congregation.

In one sense the apostles were given their mission statement by Jesus before He ascended into heaven: *To make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded* (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). This happens as they *go into all the world and proclaim the gospel* (cf. Mark 16:15) and as *repentance for the forgiveness of sins*

is *proclaimed in the name of Jesus to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem* (cf. Luke 24:47). The impetus for doing this? Jesus told them in Acts 1:8 → *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* The guidance from God is always bound up in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Certainly Paul and Barnabas were very aware of the Lord's guidance on their first missionary journey as that guidance was given through the gathered church. Acts 13:2 says: *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* What work? The text does not give us the specifics of that work.

Isn't it frustrating when the Lord gives guidance but doesn't give you all the details involved with how that guidance is "fleshed out" in your behavior? This is true to Yahweh's nature throughout the history of His dealings with His people. He gives instructions and leaves you hanging to take the steps of faith as you follow His instructions. You must make decisions about specific details as you serve Him based on your faith, trusting the Holy Spirit's working in the midst of those decisions. Acts 13:3 continues: *So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went . . .*

Our text finds Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy on another missionary journey, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they traveled from

place to place in a effort to share the Gospel *to the end of the earth*. This missionary journey began differently from the first one. According to Acts 15:36, it appears to have been the result of a desire in Paul's heart to *return and visit the brothers in every city where he proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are*. They must have made a faith decision to do this journey, even mapping out specific routes.

However, in their desire to fulfill the mission that God had given them **and empowered them to fulfill by His Holy Spirit**, some things happened which seem very strange as we read about them in our text. We are told in verses 6-8 that they were *forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they . . . attempted to go into Bithynia . . . the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them*. How frustrating it must have been to be hindered from fulfilling their mission while implementing their plan of strategy to do so! Wouldn't it seem like the Holy Spirit was working against them by not allowing them to do things according to their plan?

Such frustration is experienced by many Christians and congregations as they strive to fulfill the mission of sharing the Gospel of Jesus. For instance, your discussion with someone seems to be going nowhere, many times hindered from continuing by circumstances or outright rejection. How about the program which has been so well planned and implemented to reach out to others with the Gospel only to

seem to have failed, not producing the desired results? Such frustrations are expressed when planning further mission work with statements like: “Well, we tried to do that before but it just didn’t work!”

Such a statement is very interesting indeed. It’s focus is completely on our desire to control the Holy Spirit rather than recognize His control in our faith decisions. You cannot say “it just didn’t work” from the Holy Spirit’s perspective because the Holy Spirit is always at work through the Gospel shared by His people. All it can be is a statement of frustration because the Holy Spirit didn’t do things my (or our) way, many times causing people to give up efforts to fulfill the mission.

The disciples’ missionary work displayed their **constant awareness of the Holy Spirit’s guidance** in their desire to fulfill the mission. Instead of giving up the mission they recognized the Holy Spirit’s work through it all somehow. They continued to remain faithful to God’s “mission statement,” if you will, as they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit to share God’s Word with other people. Thus it is always based on **God’s timing** and **His direction**. He sets the agenda and guides the path during the implementation of our faith plans.

As you strive to follow God’s guidance in His written Word, are you sensitive to the guidance He may provide you in the unfolding of your daily vocations, relationships and conversations? While in Troas our text tells us that Paul received guidance and direction from the Lord by way

of a vision of a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (verse 9) Notice verse 10 says: *When Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*** Based on this guidance they made the faith decision to go to Macedonia.

Even if you do not receive visions, could there be other ways in which the Holy Spirit is directing you to share the Gospel in the unfolding of your daily vocations, relationships and conversations? Plans changed in midstream could be the Holy Spirit’s moving you into a different direction for an open door of ministry. Later, Paul interpreted what happened in our text this way according to 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 → *When I came to Troas to preach the Gospel of Christ . . . my spirit was not at rest . . . so I took leave . . . and went on to Macedonia.* Instead of focusing on why the Spirit wouldn’t let him go where he wanted to go he focused on where else the Lord was leading him.

When a person “pops into your mind” could this be the Spirit’s prompting you to pray for or even contact that person? When a thought comes to mind as you desire to bring Christ into the lives of others could it be the Holy Spirit guiding you into a particular direction? When the Scriptures say the Spirit told somebody something it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s an audible sound. Maybe it’s a thought. Either way, it requires

a faith decision, trusting the Holy Spirit's working through His Word as we share it with others.

Galatians 5:16 says: *Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* The Holy Spirit calls us to repent of our efforts to *gratify the desires of the flesh* which seek to control God's guidance in our lives. Galatians 5:25 says: *If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step **with the Spirit**.* This happens when we confess Jesus as Lord of our lives **and** as Lord of the specifics while fulfilling His mission of bringing Christ to the nations and the nations to Christ. The Holy Spirit is always working through the Gospel we share under His guidance. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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