

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 26th 2019

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Acts 16:9-15 ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. ¹¹ Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. ¹⁴ Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵ And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

What a difference we see between this Paul and the Paul we first met on the road to Damascus. There also Paul saw a vision, but there he did not know who it was who was talking to him. Now he immediately knows the voice of His Lord with certainty. The English word "concluding" doesn't really convey the force of the Greek word. It would be better to translate "came to absolute conviction." Paul doesn't just think that this is God's will he is sure of it.

How can he be so certain? How can he know it isn't a dream, or a sign from Satan?

Luther supposedly also had a vision but he knew immediately it was from Satan and threw his ink pot at it. How did Paul know it was from God while Luther was equally certain it was Satan?

One of the ways God lets his will be known is by closing all other doors.

In the verses before our text Paul tries to go to Asia and the Spirit of the Lord stopped him. He tried to go to Bithynia and the Spirit of the Lord blocked him again. He really had no choice but to go west. And then God opened a door for him in Philippi.

So often when God really wants us to go one direction he lets us know His will by blocking all other opportunities. We might feel like all doors are closed but God has closed them for a reason.

That is partially how I ended up here. First I was blocked from going anywhere else, both Seattle and Chicago, then secondly all the excuses I had for not taking the call here God kept removing. I felt like Moses at the burning bush, who kept offering up excuses to God and God kept removing them

A similar thing happened to C F W Walther. He was sent to a church in the East. When he got there they didn't want him. What was he to do? Then he received a call from Saint Louis. He went to Saint Louis and became instrumental in the founding of the Missouri Synod.

We might not have visions from the Lord to show us which way to go but he does often leads us by closing doors.

It probably feels that way with our teacher call. As though God keeps closing door after door. We keep trying but he keeps closing them.

Yet we can be certain that God will provide an open door. After so many shut ones suddenly we will find an open one and we will go through and we will marvel at the opportunities God will provide and we will wonder why we were ever worried.

See how God blessed Paul's work. He stopped him from going here and there. But then in Philippi, Lydia and her whole household were baptized, and then shortly later the Jailer of Philippi and his whole household.

Another important aspect to knowing God's will is learning to recognize His voice.

One big difference between the vision of Paul and Luther was the message of the vision. The message of Paul's vision was this that he should go and preach the gospel. the message of Luther's vision was a temptation to take the easy way out. Luther and Paul were able to recognize that voice because they had grown in their knowledge of the Lord. They had reached a spiritual maturity that allowed them to recognize the true voice of their shepherd.

In our Gospel reading, "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;" **John 16:25,26**

When you speak to children you speak figuratively or in simple terms or in stories. So also Jesus is describing how He has to speak figuratively to the apostles because spiritually they are children. When he say "in that day I will speak to you plainly" He indicates a day when the apostles are mature in their faith and knowledge. Then Jesus will no longer need to speak to them in parables. But more than that look at what he says in that day "you will ask in my name" and you will receive. Again as children we do not know how to ask for things that are for our good, but when we are mature in our faith then we can pray and ask and mountains will move before us. Because then we will have learned both to will and to do according to His good pleasure.

Ephesians 4:14 ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,

This maturity of faith of course comes through diligent bible study, and it is this maturity of faith that allows you to hear and know the voice of your shepherd.

This is why you might come to church some day and say what does that sermon have to do with me? That doesn't apply to my life. And of course not everything will apply directly or immediately to your life. Although it may be that it is something that will come back to you at some other time. But it might also be that this particular bit of information or maybe the whole sermon is not applicable to your life. But it is still useful and important because you are learning to know and understand your Savior a little bit better.

Every story of scripture is a story of God working in the life of his believers. And therefore every bit of information helps us to know our Good Shepherd and thus to know his voice a little better.

Just like when you are married. Does it really "apply to your life" what your spouse did at work, or what your children learned in school? No, but knowing and talking about those things brings you closer as a family. So too getting to know our shepherd brings us closer to him and helps us to know his voice

Keep your heart on the things of God

Thirdly Paul is able to distinguish the voice of his Shepherd because he lets go of the things of this earth and has his eyes are firmly planted on the things of heaven.

That is our sermon text for Thursday, "set your heart on the things above."

How easy it would be for Paul to say, "I can't go to Asia. I can't go to Bithynia. I might as well turn around and go home and get some rest and I can go out to preach some other time."

But of course he does not because his desire is to preach the gospel. His heart is set on the things of God.

Satan will always use the things of this world to tempt us. When we put these things away from our hearts and set our hearts on the things above we remove his greatest weapon.

When our hearts are set on the things of this world we cannot see clearly the path of God, because we are distracted by the path we desire

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. **Revelation 12:11**

Notice they overcame by letting go of their lives, by not holding on to the things of this world. This is important but of course it is not the most important thing.

Most important is the "blood of the Lamb." It His death and His blood which covers their sins and through which they are saved. Yet as long as we hold on to the things of this world it will hinder our walk of faith.

When we are children in faith our Good shepherd will lead and guide. Sometimes that guide is telling us no over and over again. When we are mature in faith we are better able to recognize His will and voice. Either way he will lead and guide us as our Good Shepherd who gave His life for our sins.

Amen