

May 22, 2022

Acts 16:9-15

“God on The Edge”

Who here has always gotten whatever they wanted? Don't make me call you out for raising your hand. **No one** gets everything they want in life. Who here has found *nothing but affirmation and certainty* in their spiritual life? There is no need to worry this doesn't describe you because the spiritual life doesn't come in that flavor. ***Our experience tells us this as do all the great spiritual guides over the centuries.*** Yet, even knowing it doesn't come in the flavor of easy, pleasurable, and comfortable – that is the life we want. Sign me up twice.

When we ponder this disappointment: that life with God doesn't just make everything easy – it is crucial we understand ***the weak link is us.*** We don't *know* enough. We don't *understand* what we are looking at. And we know for sure there have been times in our lives we were most blessed by *not getting what we wanted.*

Our text today from Acts is a marvelous case study in the beautiful things God can do with our participation – *without our knowing* what is going on, yet trusting along the way. It is important to notice that Paul has been working away in his calling to proclaim the risen Lord and establish communities of faith in that part of the world we think of as the Middle East. One doesn't know exactly the process Paul used for deciding where to go next – but Paul was set on *moving deeper into Asia* with the message of God among us in Jesus – and we are told in the scripture that the spirit of Jesus stopped him. He was sure he knew what God wanted – and God said no. That's tough.

We also struggle to know what God wants us to do. And when we settle on something *we are sure is blessed by God* and God suddenly feels absent in our efforts – it is more than disappointing – it is discouraging.

Does Paul take his marbles and go home? “I *tried* to do great things for you God. People though out Asia *could* have known about you – but “No” – you won't have it. Fine! But remember Lord, this is on you.” We have been tempted to say such things to the Lord of the universe - God help us. We are wise if instead we follow Paul and *keep taking steps* as God's path opens before us.

How they get to Troas is unclear – but sleeping in that port city Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia asking him to come and help them. ***We rarely have such visions – but we can recognize need.*** Paul and his friends wasted no time sailing to Samothrace and then on to Neapolis. Such a *quick description* in the passage...and no small thing. Sailing in those days was not a given. There was risk involved sailing the 70 miles to Samothrace and then another 70 miles to Neapolis. That's a lot of untamed sea.

When we decide God is calling us in a particular direction – God happily uses such *selfless courage as is shown here*. There is work to be done, yes, but we know it will be worth it. ***Risk to answer God's call is met with God's faithfulness.***

Meanwhile, in far off Philippi – there was a successful businesswoman who was earnestly seeking God. She was intrigued by what she knew of the God of Israel. Of course, she was a *Gentile* – and a *woman* so it wasn't easy for her to follow up and connect to this God she was drawn to. But she persevered – as part of doing what she could to be faithful, she gathered with others for prayer on the Sabbath. Week in and week out she gathered in search of God's "something more."

It is easy to rush to that moment on the Sabbath when Paul was speaking, and God moved in Lydia's heart, and she believed. Yet ***long before*** that moment God had been at work: God was at work ***both creating and using roadblocks*** to bring these two together that *something wonderful* might happen.

We can be encouraged by this text in two important ways. First – ***there is a lot of unsexy day by day, step by step, faithfulness here – and God uses it all.*** God used ordinary circumstances and people. God used people who were considered ***"less than"*** by their contemporaries. And yet, Lydia's home became the launching pad for the Christian church in Europe and beyond. Wow.

We ***imagine*** we would be happy if life were always smooth. Yet, God keeps *meeting us in the rough edges*...the edges where *we are surprised* to find God – where God has been at work *all along*. Step by step – day by day – God is faithful, and we are *right to anticipate* and be on the look out for what God will do next: especially on the edges of life.