

“Show Me the Way”

Acts 16:6-15

6th Sunday of Easter

CCUMC

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How many of you have ever been on a trip, and got a little lost? Unsure of your next direction? Unsure where to go next? (ask for a show of hands) For those of you who are being honest, what do you do when you are stumbling around at a loss for direction? (ask for their input—ex. Stop and ask for directions, look at your map app, etc.) Have any of you ever prayed to God, “Lord, show me the way to go!”

The characters in our story today, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, were probably praying that prayer. They were on a trip, and at a loss as to their next direction. Not too long ago (in chapter 15) the Jerusalem Council commissioned them to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Gentiles. Peter, the one who began the initial outreach to the Gentiles (which we learned about last week), testified at this council that “we, the Jews, will be saved through the grace of Jesus Christ, just as they, the Gentiles, will.” In the spirit of sharing the good news with all, the council endorsed Paul and Silas, and sent them to Antioch to new believers there. They excitedly taught and proclaimed the word of God in Antioch. Paul then made the suggestion to go visit other new church plants in Syria. Scripture (Acts 16:5) says that the

churches were strengthened and increased in numbers daily.

Excitement and joy surrounded Paul and his little team of missionaries.

Paul and his team were primed and pumped to share good news farther afield. (look at map) When they tried to go east toward Asia, though, the Holy Spirit said, "no." When they tried to go north to Bithynia, the Holy Spirit said, "no." Same for when they tried to go South. Paul and crew were literally backed into a corner into the port city of Troas. Fortunately, that night Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man pleading with him to come to visit him. Macedonia lay in the only direction left for them to go—east.

Paul, Timothy, and Silas now have some direction. They prayed for the Lord to show them where to go, and the Lord said, "Go east." Now lots of cities and villages lie east of Troas—not to mention all of Europe. Conscientiously focused on Macedonia, which would be modern day Greece, the team didn't stop at Samothrace, a fun little island spot. They didn't stop at Neapolis, a scenic and delightful coastal town. Nope. Paul and company set their sights on Philippi, a large cosmopolitan city where the power of the Roman empire breathed and ruled. Surely, they thought, God is sending us right into the heart of this powerful colony of Rome so that God can show these pagans who is in charge. Oh, yeah. We've got our directions right. We know where we're going.

They got there, and seemed to dither for several days. They stumbled about in this impressive city, not certain what God would have them to do. They were a little unsure of their direction now that they were finally at what they thought was their destination.

Finally, Sabbath came, and they knew they should at least find a Jewish community with whom to worship. They ask about, and no one can give them directions to any synagogue. Finally, someone tells them of a gathering outside the city at a riverbank. Eager and full of excitement (and a little self-importance), they think they will finally meet the Macedonian man Paul saw in his vision.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy arrive at a tired, dusty spot outside the city. This is not the place of importance, not a city square to launch their ministry. Instead of a large gathering of the significant men of the city, they see women, with a few old men hanging around. Women? they think. Paul secretly wondered if they had the right directions.

Nonetheless, the trio tell the women of God's love. Then Lydia introduces herself. She is a Gentile, a prosperous businesswoman, the leader of this community, a woman who owns her own home without reference to a man. She is from Asia, the place where Paul wasn't allowed to go. She opens her heart up to Paul's teaching, and has the

rest of her household baptized. Lydia offers her home to the trio; they looked in need of a good bath and warm food.

Paul accepts her hospitality, and realizes that his Macedonian man vision turned out to be a foreign woman by a riverbank. "God works in mysterious ways," he must have thought. The Holy Spirit moved Paul, Timothy, and Silas to a place they would have never expected, and brought blessings to them there. After close to a 2,000 mile journey God gave them directions to where grace was most needed.

So too we can be certain that God will direct us, too. Certainly for us individually, when we feel lost in life, or unsure of our next steps, we can pray, "God, show me the way." We open our hearts to where the Holy Spirit is directing us—and we keep asking the Holy Spirit for directions. We may wind up in a place we never expected, but we expect grace to be waiting for us no matter where we go.

Most significantly though, this text from Acts is directed to the church, to a community that at times may feel lost out at sea. Just as God was with the little trio of Paul, Timothy, and Silas, the Holy Spirit will be with us, too. We at CCUMC are a little at a loss, a little unsure of our next pastoral leadership. We are also praying, "Lord, show us the way to go." I've heard several concerns from you this week on this.

Note that in our text today, the men as God's church had to discern their direction together. Finding the way to God's direction requires a community. Paul had the vision, but they all had to decide where to go with it. So too, the direction of this church isn't dependent on the vision of one pastor, either me or the new pastor who will be coming to you. All of CCUMC is called to discern God's directions for this church. Christians don't try to find their way alone.

Thankfully, in this church, our administrative and visioning body, the church council, has been actively discerning the next direction for the church. Your leadership team, which meets today, is always open to your visions. (have church council stand and recognized Stephen) The council's work is always communal and collaborative. Today when we meet we will be implementing new plans and goals for the church. The Staff Parish Relations Committee has worked hard to share with our Bishop and District Superintendent information about our church for the best selection of new leadership.

Even as you await a new pastor, you continue discerning the Holy Spirit's direction, trusting that God is indeed guiding you to places of blessings and riverbanks where grace is most needed. We trust that God is setting your mission and direction, maybe calling you into places and to people we would have never considered before. The Holy Spirit will be faithful to lead you, to show you the way, and to

lead many more to come to this community to be baptized and grow in faith. Just be sure to stop, to pray, and to keep asking for directions every now and then. Thanks be to a faithful, directional God. Amen.