

Why Did the Apostle Cross the Sea?

May 1, 2016

Acts 16:9-15

In a recent newsletter article, I wrote about the need for Emanuel to be an *inviting* church. That's very important. But the focus of Acts sixteen, verses nine through fifteen, is on being an *invited* church. Paul's vision of the Macedonian man contains an urgent request. "Come and help us," he pleads.

Let's be an inviting church. But let's remember that we are also an invited church.

We cry out as well. Jesus, come and help us! Come across the waters of baptism and touch my heart. Calm the storms of my life and fill me with your Holy Spirit. Give me the power to live in hope and joy.

That's why I go on your behalf to people in their homes, in the hospital, in nursing homes, in prison and recovery centers. "Come and help us," our sisters and brothers cry out. You send me in Jesus' name. You go yourselves in Jesus' name. We go because our sisters and brothers cry out. We go because our cries have been answered as well.

Jesus comes even before we can ask. We worship the God who shows up. That's the message in that last part of Revelation. "*Now is the home of God among human beings,*" we read at the beginning of Revelation, chapter twenty-one. The heavenly Jerusalem comes to us, not the other way around. In John fourteen, we hear it again. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God comes and makes a home with us.

And here we are—Emanuel Lutheran Church. That name, "Emanuel," means "God with us." We Emanuel folks are the "with you" church. It's what we do. We hear the cries and we show up. We do that because that's what Jesus does for us, through us, and in us.

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We may wonder how we will be welcomed. Paul must have wondered that many times. When he and his companions came to Philippi, things didn't look good. There was a sign on the city gate. The sign said, "No foreign religions allowed. Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law." The full extent of the law involved jail, torture, and possible execution. Not much of a welcome.

But Paul knew the call didn't come just from some man in a dream. This was a call from Jesus. Paul knew he could count on doors to open and things to happen. The Holy Spirit got there ahead of Paul. The Holy Spirit always gets there ahead of us. Waiting for Paul were Lydia and her household. They gathered every week for prayer and worship. They gathered by the river because they were not welcome in the city.

Paul preached. Lydia listened. Paul baptized. Lydia launched a congregation. Paul wanted to get while the getting was good. But Lydia was a formidable woman. She prevailed on him to stay—for well over a year.

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How are we being invited? Who is pleading, “Come and help us”?

We hear the residents at the Midlands Living Center who need regular communion and pastoral support.

We hear the residents at Bethany Lutheran Home who need the company of friends and neighbors. By the way, you can come and help us lead Bingo at Bethany on May fourth if you'd like.

We hear the families who need accessible, quality, reliable, Jesus-centered daycare for their beloved children.

We hear our friends at Our Savior's who need to expand their food pantry ministry to serve even more people. Several of you have signed up to help with that expanded ministry.

We hear a neighborhood that lost its beating heart when Gunn Elementary School closed. Emanuel folks are working hard to help this neighborhood find its center, its purpose and its community life.

We hear from a different community agency or ministry every month when we make our Joyful Noise offerings. We are known as the place that gives to the community and then gives some more.

Dear friends, this is only a partial list of the cries for help and our responses. It is always my honor to serve a congregation that cares so much.

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An invited church is always a sending church as well. That's why we honor our graduating seniors today. Our young people are discerning their callings to worship God, follow Jesus and serve by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our young people will be called in many ways in the years to come.

As you go, dear friends, we pray for you on your journey. You will have adventures. You will grow and mature. You will make the world a better place. You will be tested at times. You may suffer and sacrifice for your faith, hope and love. You may think you are heading one direction when the Holy Spirit sends you off in another. We pray that it will always be interesting.

As you go, please know that you do not go alone. The Holy Spirit will be there ahead of you. Jesus will be there beside you. God will be there around you. Your church family will hold you close in our prayers, our thoughts and our love. Next year you will likely receive care packages to remind you of that connection. Please know that wherever you go, the church will be there when you cry out for help.

Let me close with my favorite prayer for any life journey. It comes from the service of Morning Prayer. Let us pray. O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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