

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Ninth Sunday After Trinity, July 28, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 39 (14:5) 296, 499, 283

Lessons: Isaiah 29:18-21; 2 Corinthians 3:4-9; John 8:31-36

Text: Acts 16:9-15

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Jesus our Lord,

Do you ever think about the purpose of the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship? We are a tiny group of people. Our membership now is less than when we organized the LCCF more than 40 years ago. We had more pastors in the beginning than we have now, for not all of them were steadfastly committed to our doctrinal stand. In addition, the Lord has called to their eternal home those whom he has determined that their earthly work is done. It is not easy to stand up for the truth of God's Word when there are only a few who stand with us. It's much easier to join with a larger group in which there are more congregations, more pastors, and possibly a church nearby. Going with the majority is always the easiest, but not the best.

Tiny though we are, our church body has a blessed purpose in existing. We want to continue steadfast in God's Word of Truth and encourage others to do so. In an age when most churches join in with the false ecumenical movement, we want to remain a confessional church that continues to teach the saving truths of God's Word. Jesus says, *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,"* John 8:31-32. We have a glorious purpose, for the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ our Savior, has given us the precious message of salvation to spread to others. We want others to know that *"Jesus Christ, the Righteous One is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,"* 1 John 2:2. We want other people to know that *"salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved,"* Acts 4:12.

Therefore as we learn of Paul's mission work in our text, let us emphasize that

THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF OUR CHURCH
IS TO STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH
AND PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.

- 1. We have the call from the Lord.**
- 2. We have the pure Word to proclaim.**
- 3. We are assured that the spreading of the Gospel will result in many blessings.**

Our text tells us what happened on Paul's second missionary journey. *"During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" Paul and his companions had visited the places where he had preached on his first missionary journey. The purpose was to preach the Word of God and in this way to confirm the people in their knowledge of the truth.*

It is to be emphasized that the Lord was guiding the Apostle Paul and his companions as to where he wanted them to preach. They had decided to go to a new territory and bring the Gospel to Asia, but the Holy Spirit made known to them that the Lord did not want them to go there. Then they decided to go northward into

Bithynia, but again the Lord made known that he did not want them to go there. It was that same night that the Lord gave a vision to Paul in which a man said, ***“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”***

Then we are told, ***“After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”*** It is Luke who is writing this account in Acts who together with Timothy and Silas were with Paul. These four men were concluding that the Lord had given them a call to preach in Macedonia. The call of the Lord is to be emphasized, for Paul writes, ***“How can they preach unless they are sent?”*** Romans 10:15.

We also speak of the Lord giving us a call to proclaim the Gospel to others. The Lord gives a general call to all believers in Christ in what we call the Great Commission. ***“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation,”*** Mark 16:15. As long as this world stands the believers in Christ will have this general call to spread the Gospel. Are we aware of this call from the Lord to us? Do we think about how we can carry out this Great Commission? We don't have to think about going to some foreign nation though we know that there are millions of people in the world who do not worship the true God and do not hear the Gospel of Christ. How about our next-door neighbor who does not go to any church? Do we make it our business to speak to him about spiritual matters? How about our fellow workers in the place where we are employed? We have suggested on the back of our printed Ministry by Mail sermons that sending the printed sermons to someone is good mission work. The Lord also calls men who have prepared for the public ministry to proclaim the Gospel in congregations that have extended a divine call to a pastor. Whether it is the called pastor or lay people who help spread the Gospel, they can be assured that the Lord wants them to do this work. No one should have to urge believers in Christ to be interested in spreading the Gospel. They should know that this is the main reason God has for them being on this earth.

By the grace of God **we have the pure Word to proclaim.** This fact should encourage us to do the work of spreading the Gospel.

2.

First of all we learn how the apostles got to Macedonia. ***“From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.”*** This journey was undertaken with great haste, but the Lord brought the men safely to their destination. Humanly speaking, this city of Philippi could be considered a good place to do mission work. It was on the main road between Europe and Asia, and it was a Roman colony where people had the rights and privileges of Roman citizens.

But the work there did not begin in a way that would impress anyone in the world. Luke reports, ***“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.”*** There were just a few women gathered outdoors by a river. Do you suppose that Paul and his companions wondered why the Lord had brought them to Macedonia? Here we must remember that the Lord has his own way of doing things. His ways may seem very strange sometimes and we know that worldly people will despise the Lord's way. Paul has something to say about this in writing to the believers at Corinth in Greece. ***“The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him,”*** 1 Corinthians 1:25-29. We must keep in mind that in the kingdom of God great numbers or impressive outward advantages mean little or nothing. Many a congregation in the past has had very humble beginnings. It is sad and disgusting when any church body boasts

of their large membership or tries to make an impression upon the world and does not teach and preach the pure Word of God.

The important thing at Philippi was that the apostles had the pure Gospel to preach. That is the one essential thing in our church work also in our day. If a church body has lost the truth of the Gospel it has no excuse for existing! It is only by the grace of God as his undeserved gift that we still have the true Word of God to proclaim. All glory and praise be to God for this precious gift! Each one of us should show our gratitude by hearing, learning and studying the Word of God so that in the years to come we still have the pure Word to proclaim to others.

When we have a call from the Lord to preach his Word, and have that Word preserved to us in its purity, then **we may also be assured that the spreading of the Gospel will result in many blessings.**

3.

Our text tells us how this was the case at Philippi. ***“One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”*** Lydia was a businesswoman who sold garments dyed with a costly dye. She had been taught the Jewish religion, but did not know that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. She learned the truth when Paul preached there by the riverside. He told her all about Jesus and salvation. She could learn that Jesus, the true God from eternity, also became a true man so that he could suffer and die for sinners. She could learn that ***“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,”*** John 3:16. She could learn ***“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,”*** Romans 5:8. She could learn ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,”*** Ephesians 1:7. She could learn ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification,”*** Romans 4:25. She could take comfort in hearing Jesus’ promise, ***“Because I live, you also will live,”*** John 14:19.

It was not Lydia who made a decision for Christ. Our text says, ***“the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”*** By the grace of God she was brought to faith through the work of the Holy Spirit in the powerful Gospel Word. That Gospel Word, Paul says, ***“is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,”*** Romans 1:16. Lydia ***“and the members of her household were baptized.”*** That included the servants and children. The Bible assures us, ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,”*** Mark 16:16. So the spreading of the Gospel certainly resulted in great blessings at Philippi.

Lydia immediately showed the fruits of her faith by inviting Paul and his companions, ***“If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.”*** In this way she supported the work of spreading the Gospel. The apostles had no salary on which to depend for a living. They depended upon the love of the hearers, like Lydia, and otherwise they earned their own living. This suggests to us how we can show our appreciation for what the Lord has done for us through the Gospel we have heard. The poet says it for us:

“May our zeal to help the heathen be increased from day to day as we plead in true compassion and for their conversion pray.

For the many faithful heralds, for the Gospel they proclaim, let us all be cheerful givers to the glory of Thy name,” (The Lutheran Hymnal 498:5) Amen.

(Adapted from a Ministry By Mail Sermon for September 3, 2006)