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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series C)

May 1, 2016

Text: Acts 16:9–15

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Nostalgia is a funny thing. It's never quite the same for all people. The "good ole days" for one person might not have been so good for others. People sometimes romanticize the days of the early Church under the leadership of the apostles. Things were so much better back then. No doctrinal divisions. No spats over theology or worship or money or whatever. Everybody was unified under the gospel and worked harmoniously for the advancement of God's kingdom. Those were the "good ole days."

Things were going along perfectly for the Apostle Paul and his companion, Barnabas. After much prayer and fasting, the Church in Antioch laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas and sent them forth as missionaries to establish new congregations and preach the Gospel where people had never heard of Jesus, His love and grace. You can read about it in Acts 13–14. Those most have been exciting days. And the mission tour was a complete success. They preached the gospel; people heard, believed, and were baptized. Congregations were established. The Church of Jesus Christ was on the move! Listen to how the mission trip came to a conclusion in Acts 14:27, "And when they (i.e., Paul and Barnabas) arrived (at Antioch) and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."

After some time, Paul and Barnabas decide it's time to go back and visit the churches they had established during their mission trip. It seemed like the perfect time (Acts 15:36–41). But then they hit a snag. Barnabas wants to take along with them a young man named Mark. Paul thinks it's a mistake. Mark began the first mission tour but left when things got tough. In Paul's mind, the young man isn't cut out for mission work. Barnabas thinks differently.

Everybody wants the same thing: the advancement of God's kingdom but there's a disagreement on how best to go about it. What happened? Listen to Acts 15:39, "And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each." Paul and Barnabas couldn't work things out. It must have been a bitter disappointment for everyone involved to see how things transpired.

But the Gospel must go out into the world. Paul takes with him another companion named Silas. And the second missionary journey begins, albeit with a rocky start. That sets the stage for today's first reading from Acts 16:9–15. While waiting in Troas (northwestern Turkey), Paul receives a vision of a man requesting that they come to Macedonia (vs. 9). Macedonia? That's north of Greece, in Europe. Macedonia was on the original itinerary. But Paul was convinced that God had called them "to preach the gospel to the Macedonians" (vs. 10).

They set sail for Macedonia and arrive at the Roman colony of Philippi. For a few days Paul wanders around waiting for the Sabbath to arrive in order to preach at the synagogue. But it appears that Philippi doesn't have a synagogue. You need at least 10 Jewish men to form one. Instead, he found a prayer meeting by the river attended solely by women (vs. 13).

This wasn't how Paul normally went about things. He usually found the local Jewish synagogue and began preaching about Jesus there. But Philippi doesn't have a synagogue because there aren't enough men to form one. But the Lord had called him to preach in Macedonia. And here they are. Well, Paul joins this prayer group and preaches about Jesus; His death and resurrection for the life of the world. It's not what he expected but it's what the Lord gave him. He gladly takes it. And the Lord opens the heart of at least one faithful woman – Lydia (vs. 14). And according to vs. 15, she and her entire household are baptized. That's the pattern in the book of Acts. Entire households come to faith: husbands and wives believe and are baptized along with all the children and resident servants.

Today we rejoice in Haley's baptism. Like Lydia, 2,000 years ago, she receives God's Trinitarian name in baptismal waters and received all the promises attached to baptism: forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation.

This entire time God has been working to fulfill His good and gracious will: through dissension that split Paul and Barnabas, by redirecting it into areas not fully

considered, and by leading Paul to a prayer meeting of women gathered by a river because there wasn't a Jewish synagogue. This is not what Paul expected.

But God was active in it all. None of it was ideal, planned, or anticipated. But the church grew and people came to faith in Jesus. At least two marvelous things are imbedded in this text from Acts 16. First, Lydia and the women who came to faith in Philippi are the first Christian converts of Europe. From this point forward the Church of Jesus Christ would grow and move westward – into Greece, Italy, France, Spain, the British Isles; into North America and finally all the way to Burns/Kimball. As members of the western Church, this is our roots, our heritage, and our birthplace.

Second, the first convert of Europe is woman from Thyatira (vs. 14). That's back in Asia (modern day Turkey), the very region Paul wanted to go to from the very beginning! Paul got his wish after all. Missionary work would continue in Asia, not through Paul but through Lydia a seller of purple. God is working powerfully in His ways, not ours.

Dear saints, through the power of God's radical Gospel marvelous things occur even in events and situations that we consider to be impossible for God's blessings. I find that we all too often sit back waiting for things to become ideal in the church and in our personal lives.

If I could only find that church with people who are really serious about living for Jesus; that church with an active youth group, the right kind of music, a dynamic pastor, and whatever else. Then I'd get involved and be committed. With such criteria, would you have joined Paul's mission group that formed after a big blowup with Barnabas? Would you have continued when things didn't go according to plan? And when the Church struggles, both locally and abroad, do we stay with her believing that the Lord Jesus will continue to work His salvation in the lives of people?

And what about our personal lives? When I have more free time, better health, more finances, a stable and fulfilling job, after I graduate, when I get married and have kids and everything is just right then I'll get serious about following Jesus. Such was not the thinking of Lydia who was hundreds of miles away from home, who would go back to a Thyatira. And, as far we know, Thyatira didn't even have a Christian church. At least not yet. It would later. In the book of Revelation, St. John writes to the seven churches of Asia, one of which was in Thyatira. God was working marvelously in less than ideal circumstances.

This is the day of salvation. Now is the time for repentance, faith, and daily obedience. There will be no better time than now. This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is too radical, too powerful for us to think that we can control and manipulate. Our Lord has bound Himself to the preaching of His holy Word and the administration of His saving sacraments to be sure. But how these great and marvelous gifts work in ideal and less than ideal conditions is beyond our control and quite often beyond our comprehension. But what He says to you and me and to all His Church is that He is active and busy through Word and Spirit in your life. This is the sure and certain confidence into which all of us are baptized into. Jesus said he had overcome the world, sin, death and the devil. Paul preached it. Lydia believed it. She and her entire household were baptized and probably become instrumental in the establishment of the Christian Church in Thyatira. And the Church has grown and prospered with such promises in good and bad times for over two thousand years.

God works to save and redeem in all kinds of circumstances. But what else would you expect from the One who brings life from death. This is the day of God's salvation. These are the "good ol days!" Right now. At this time, in this place; even in your hearts and minds. Let us rejoice and be glad in it

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.