**Acts 16:9-15** October 23,2016

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Mission Sunday

 *9During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10After 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.*

 *11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.*

 *13 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. 14One 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. 15When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 That was a good reading wasn’t it? Real missionaries, going to new lands, taking the gospel places it had never been heard before. Let me tell you something before we start: I did not choose this text because this is a perfect description of the work I did in Africa. I didn’t get on a plane to deepest darkest Africa where no Christian had ever set foot among tribes antagonistic to Christianity. I did not start my preaching career in a market-place thronging with people who had never heard the name Jesus. This text and this sermon are not auto-biographical.

 What I want you to know is that these words of God are first of all *for me* to hear, to learn from, and to repent before, to be encouraged by. I need to hear them. And you do too! Let us hear about

**God’s Call and You**

**I. God calls us because people need to be saved
II. God calls us to act
III. God’s call produces a harvest**

 Paul and his friends were desperate. They were on a journey, sent by God. The problem is they didn’t know where to go. Now as I read, skip over the names you don’t know. The specifics aren’t important. Think about what Paul and company *were thinking*, *“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.”* (Ac 16:6-8) They were on a missionary journey, but God wouldn’t let them speak the Gospel. They turned west – stopped. North – hindered. West again – stopped. God pushed them to land’s end, literally. At Troas, the sea stood before them. Where should they go?

 ***“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*** (9) Did you hear that pleading voice? ***“Help us!*** Rescue us.” That was not a Macedonian man talking by some clairvoyant method, it was God speaking in a vision. God was alerting this missionary group to a real need. There were people who needed their only Saviour Jesus. ***“Help them!”***  People in Macedonia were headed for destruction —no matter what their tolerant pantheistic society said. The fires of hell waited for them. “Help them!” was God’s urgent call to go and save those people.

 We too have this call. Our places have names just as strange as Phrygia, Mysia, Bithynia and Macedonia. Have you ever heard of Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique or Zimbabwe? These are countries in southern Africa where the Wisconsin Synod supports mission work. These four countries of cover about the same area as the US east of the Mississippi and have about 60 million people. And like in our own country many many millions need our help. Maybe you hear about drilling wells for drinking water, and HIV/AIDS epidemics, and poverty, and famines in Africa. But I tell you that the greatest danger is not reported by any 24/7 news channel. The tragedy is the millions who are oppressed and brutalized by sin and sin’s author, Satan. These are the reason I/we was called by God to Zambia and Malawi for most of the last twenty years.

 God calls all Christians to be partners in this mission. He has called us to together support the Lutheran Church of Central Africa. The Lutheran Church of Central Africa which once started as a WELS mission is not a mission any more. We send missionaries, but the LCCA gives directions where the eight WELS missionaries can be used together with the 60 or so African pastors. God has called us who have a blessed heritage of hundreds of years of Christianity to be partners with a church of 65 years, training and offering help as they reach out to the millions of unsaved people. At the same time they strive to make the Good News of Jesus real and relevant to the 50,000 members of LCCA churches in southern Africa.

 Be partners with all of the WELS in prayers and offerings. God has called us to give real, soul-saving help to these people.

**II. God Calls Us To Act**

 ***“After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once…”*** The great men of the Bible never wasted time. When God called, they went. When God called Moses from a burning bush, Moses simply said good-bye to his father-in-law and marched off to the emperor of the world’s greatest power. When the prophet Elijah called farmer Elisha out in the field to be his successor, Elisha stopped plowing, killed the oxen, threw a feast for the workers in the field and then followed Elijah.

 You can imagine it. This group of men in our text staying at an inn. Paul getting up in the early morning, maybe even in the middle of the night. He shakes awake Luke and the other travelers, “I know where the Lord wants us to go!” All of them waking up, agreeing. “Let’s go!” They pack up their belongings, the first ones to check out of the inn in the morning before the sun was up, shouldering their packs and with quick steps making their way through the town to the harbor to find the first ship headed toward Macedonia. They had a mission. It says, ***“We got ready at once…we concluded that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them.”***

 Do you sense the urgency? People without Jesus? Let’s save them!

 And consider this: up to this point these men had no intention of going to Macedonia, where God called them. They had had their own thoughts and plans – possibly very well thought out plans. But when God called they put everything else to the side. After two days in a boat and another couple on foot, they came to the town of Philippi. On the first Sabbath they went to a place where the Jews would have been worshipping. On his mission journeys Paul always went first to the Jews. He presented Jesus as the fulfillment of what Jews had believed for centuries. ***“We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there”*** (13) – complete strangers!

 I can’t speak for you, but I have to tell you, this text calls me to repentance. Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit tugging at you to share the Gospel in a conversation, but you didn’t? Have you ever intentionally evangelized a stranger? Have you ever passed up opportunities to do evangelism for your church – whether on the phone or on the street – and didn’t for no other reason than your own personal comfort? Sure, you had your reasons, but really? None of you may be called to be full-time missionaries, but when was the last time you used God’s word in the hopes of filling one more seat at the wedding feast of our Saviour? And if this paragraph of the sermon bothers your conscience, take a second to repent before your Heavenly Father. And then let us live to serve him who saved us.

 We have the blessing of knowing our Savior Jesus. We know that heaven is ours through his forgiveness. Even though we have sinned and are sinners, we are washed clean by Jesus. We have that certainty through faith. And millions do not. Let’s remember that the greatest love we can show to others is sharing the Gospel.

 God may have told Paul where to go in a vision, but no one got saved until they spoke the message of Jesus. People are never saved by our good intentions. They are saved by hearing the explicit message of Jesus. Let’s review a few phrases from our text: ***“we concluded that God had called us to preach the gospel to them…we began to speak to the women…[she] respond[ed] to Paul’s message.”*** The only thing that saves is hearing and believing the message.

**III. His Call Produces a Harvest**

 But when God’s Word is preached, something follows. It produces a harvest. In this text we hear ***“One of those listening was a woman named Lydia…, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized…”*** I saw that so often in Zambia. God’s powerful word changes people’s hearts. Brenda Himoonga had been the third wife of a polygamous man. After he died, she started taking instruction classes. In her 30’s she was confirmed and baptized, baptized together with her two-year-old son. It was the only mother-child baptism I can remember. It was also the only baptism brought to a halt when the child insistently told his mother, in a load voice in front of the entire congregation, that he needed to go to the bathroom – and since two-year olds don’t wear diapers over there, we all took a rest while the child was taken to the outhouse. “Could the choir please give us a song!” was all I could say. All joking aside, it was a wonderful day. And later that year Ms. Himoonga was in a training course for Sunday School teachers. That course, by the way, was mostly taught by Pastor Mumba our LCCA Sunday School Superintendent.

 I have gotten a bit off the point, but that is just the point. Evangelism is about people, not a program. It is about bringing them near to their Lord and Saviour. And when he calls through you, he calls with power. Some are offended or put off, but others hear and bear rich fruit. Would it not be worth a slight inconvenience to save someone for eternity?

 Our desire is that sharing the Gospel will bear the fruit of faith. It is not, however, the only fruit. From our reading, again, ***“When [Lydia] and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.”*** How often I saw that fruit of faith! When I went out to churches on Sunday mornings, I would leave at 7:30 and come back at 6 or 7 PM. I never packed a lunch. Yet out of 45-50 weeks of going out to the village, I might go hungry two or three only. I never requested that people feed me, they just did. And when people harvested, they often gave some of it to us. They knew Noah and I loved sugar cane. They knew how much we all loved the pumpkins.

 But when I was thinking of Lydia inviting these missionaries to stay at her house, I thought first of Laika Mwanamuyamba.—probably only because of some similarity of names. Because Laika was not like Lydia. Lydia of Acts 16 was rich. Laika definitely was not. Every other month we (almost the entire congregation at Chabota) got into the pick-up truck to go visit Laika Mwanamuyamba. We visited her house often. We went with God’s Word and Christ’s body and blood. One time, after bringing her Saviour to her, before parting, Laika told me to wait. That old lady for whom every slow barefoot step back into her unwindowed house is painful, she found her hiding place for her money. She unwrapped some hidden scrap of fabric hiding her savings – and it almost certainly only amounted to a couple dollars – all that she had stored away to this point in her long life. And as she unwrapped the crinkled bills she pulled out K100. A minute or two after going into the house, she came out and handed me the bill. How do you respond when someone, whose lifetime income is less than I make in a year and might be less than some of you make in three or four months – how do you respond when that person literally gives you 2¢ to buy a piece of candy for your children? Laika or Lydia, they are the same after all. *“Whoever welcomes you in my name, welcomes me,”* says the Sender of every missionary. When a believer offers what her thankful heart has determined—to decline such would be like Jesus refusing the widow’s two mites, or Paul refusing Lydia’s offer. For that K100, that 2¢, was not offered to me or my children but to the Lord Jesus himself. I had no authority to decline that gift to him. What abundant fruit the Gospel produces!

 Dear fellow Christians, God is calling. He is calling us to spread the Good News of Jesus, to spread it near and far. Be certain that it will bear abundant fruit. Amen.