

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 8, 2016
Acts 16:6-10
Mission Vision is not a Dream
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Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

There is a phrase in Latin, *ad libitum*. You are likely more familiar with its form, *ad lib*. *Ad libitum* means at liberty, or at one's pleasure. When you *ad lib*, you go away from a prepared plan. The missionaries and evangelists in the post Pentecost church learned early this is not the way the Lord wanted them to carry out the Great Commission, "go and make disciples of all nations."

There was a prepared plan. They did not make it. The Holy Spirit prepared it and laid it out. Paul and Barnabas, Timothy and Luke wisely did not *ad lib* on the Second Missionary Journey but worked the plan. God revealed the plan in a vision. This was a mission vision and not a dream like we think of a dream.

Here is the principle we need to follow as we carry out the work of spreading the good news that Jesus Christ is your Savior and mine. God opens and closes doors in the work. We go when and where God calls us to work. **Mission Work is not a Dream.**

The Apostle Paul and his companions were in central Asia Minor, today's Turkey. It was the start of the Second Missionary journey, about 49. They had thought to go due east to the province of Asia and the western cities. This was not God's plan. The Holy Spirit prevented them from going there. We do not know how the Spirit made this known. His message was clear and the disciples heeded it. When they planned to go north into Bithynia along the Black Sea, the Spirit prevented that as well. So, they traveled to a city called Troas on the Aegean coast. There the Spirit gave Paul the vision that led the disciples to cross into Macedonia.

This vision was a mission vision and not a dream. It needed no interpretation. God often used such visions to show Paul the way to go in his evangelism. God no longer uses such mission visions. The Holy Spirit directs our mission vision through providential circumstances, and sound prayerful planning. The principle remains the same. We are not free to *ad lib* in our personal and collective evangelism. We do not choose to whom or where or how we go. The Holy Spirit directs us. He opens doors. He closes doors.

We may want to share the gospel in a certain place and way but the opportunity just is not there, or it was there and is no longer. We may not think we can evangelize or want to evangelize in certain circumstances, and suddenly the Lord opens a door. This is true of people. It is true of cities. It is true of cultures and nations.

God opens doors of opportunity for you in your personal witness. It may be that family member or co-worker who is having a problem, or whose conscience troubles them. Other times the Spirit closes those doors. It is true for our congregation. God has put Bethlehem in Carmel. He has enabled us to support a preschool for over a decade. We have done Bible studies at nursing homes and retirement apartments. It looks like an outreach to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is an open door for the future. The Spirit has opened and is opening doors to us. God has closed some of those doors. He may close other doors at some point.

Our mission vision is not a dream as we think of a dream; a fantasy or wishful thinking or random images and thoughts. We are not free to *ad lib*, to do mission work at our own pleasure. We are not at liberty to insist on a certain way to reach out with Christ or continue to beat our

heads against a door the Spirit has closed. We are not free to stand still when God opens a new door because that might not be the particular way we want to go. We go when and where God calls us to work.

That is exactly what Paul and Barnabas, and Timothy and Luke did. In the Spirit's vision, a man from Macedonia appeared with the urgent request, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." He was referring to the help that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can give. It is the daily help the Spirit gives us in our need for forgiveness that strengthens and sustains our faith. We cry out every day in our failures to love God and one another, "Holy Spirit, help us. Absolve us from our sins. Continue to rain down on us the shower of the Father's grace in Christ."

The Holy Spirit opened the door to this Roman province and especially later to the city of Philippi. Paul did not argue with the Spirit or question his plan. "After Paul had seen the vision, we go ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." We notice the pronoun "we" as St. Luke includes his presence in the acceptance of God's plan. Luke was writing to his friends, Theophilus, to take the gospel to an area inhabited primarily by Gentiles. They went when and where God called them to work.

This is to be our approach to mission work. Mission vision is not our dream about what to do. It is the vision the Holy Spirit gives us as in his providence he opens and closes doors of opportunity. It is listening to those who say to us, "Come, Help us." Mission vision is a willingness to follow the Lord's lead and take the gospel to people and to places where maybe we had not thought about going. We do this through prayerful planning.

The open door to Macedonia opened the path for Paul and others to continue into other provinces and cities on Greek peninsula; Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth. We are familiar with those names through the letters Paul later wrote to congregations of believers the Holy Spirit gathered there. We know the names of Berea and Athens in connection with Paul's work.

Who knows what doors the Holy Spirit will open or close for the church at large in the future in America and foreign countries? Who know what doors will open and close for us? The Holy Spirit knows. The Holy Spirit does nothing ad libitum. He has a mission vision for God's people. Are you ready to go when and where God calls us to work? When someone calls, "Help us." Amen. <SDG>