

“Finding Your Place in God’s Mission”

Part One

Acts 16:6-10

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During the night, Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over here and help us.”

- Acts 16:9

Prayer of Preparation

O Lord, may we hear your call and so find our place in your mission. In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

Sermon

Years ago, this advertisement appeared in the classifieds of a local newspaper: “Husband says either he or puppies must go. Puppies are playful and cute. Husband is grouchy and unsympathetic. Your choice free.”¹

It just may be that one of our biggest challenges in life is relationships. At home and in the community, we can struggle to make positive contributions to our relationship with others. Even within the community of faith, relationships require effort.²

If we are talking about mission, of course, relationships matter: first, with God, and then, with others. Relationships take time, and they require wisdom and patience. I suppose if this sermon has one point to make – that’s it: finding our place in God’s mission is all about relationships.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to share about mission, to be sure, but we are also going to keep coming back to the matter of relationships. Whether we are finding ways of helping people out of poverty through Bridges, or whether we are looking to build a home through Habitat for Humanity, or whether we are helping a missionary overseas – it all goes back to *relationships*.

¹ Thanks to Douglas J. Deuel for this story: “A Call to Community” at www.esermons.com.

² Ibid.

In fact, if we read the Bible carefully, we realize how central relationships are to God's mission: whether it is Jesus and the twelve, or Peter and Lydia, or Mary and Joseph – relationships are at the center. Indeed, the actual word “mission” does not appear in the Bible. The words for mission typically are phrases like “going out,” or “being sent.” They refer to a kind of movement between the relationship of God and God's people.

If we remember that point, we will be good!

It is similar to what Pastor Jenothy shared last week: if we can focus on connecting with God, reaching out to others, and having heart, we can hear what the Spirit of Christ is calling us to do and keep what is important before us.

Finding Your Place

Hence, the title of the sermon: *Finding your place in God's mission.*³

As we consider what Faith-Promise Missions is about, in terms of giving our resources, we want to lift up ways of how we all can find our place in what God is doing – no matter how that might take shape.

For example, whether it is through giving on a faithful basis, beyond what we are giving, or whether it is by going on a mission trip; or whether it is through visiting a care facility; or by praying for those who are overseas, or simply by helping collect items for one of our projects – we all have a place in God's mission. At some level! We all have a mission.

Indeed, if we understand that we all are called to be disciples by virtue of our baptism, then we can find a sense of fulfillment in what Christ calls us to do.

To be sure, there is disappointment, along the way. Think of the hardships people Paul faced. Discipleship comes with “ups and downs.” But also consider that when we discover our mission, we also discover our passion and our purpose. There is energy. Fulfillment.

And one of the best ways I have read about how we can go about finding our mission, or discovering such fulfillment, is by understanding the following: *we can find our mission where our passion and tools intersect with the world's needs.*

Paul's Mission and Passion

³ The title of this sermon comes from the book by Jeremiah Gibbs *Finding Your Place in God's Mission* (Nashville, TN: Higher Education and Ministry Press, 2020).

Note that in our passage today, Paul and his companions have a desire or a passion to go to Asia Minor to preach the gospel. It is their second missionary journey. They know there is a need.

But the Spirit of Jesus closes the door on them, and for whatever reason, God doesn't want them to go there just yet. Instead, God opens up another door: to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:8).

This is one of the ways God works. We might think we are to go to one place, and then we get a call to go to another place. And it's a surprise. It is unexpected. We have our itinerary in place, only to get a new one!

In this case, Christ calls Paul to go over to Macedonia. Hence the name of the passage: the Macedonian Call. In fact, there is an old gospel song: "We have heard the Macedonian call. We will work for Jesus and his will obey." The passage and the song are about how we need to pay attention to how God can use us!

For example, how can God use our resources, tools, and gifts? How can Christ direct our passion? How can the Spirit help us to see the needs of others? When we begin to reflect on these questions, we hopefully will realize a couple things: first, God calls all of us to be disciples. Everyone! We all get the call to follow Jesus. It is what one author says is "God's general call."⁴

But there is also God's specific call, or "God's missional call." That's where we try to figure out the places where we can serve and the people we can help, depending on our passion, or our gifts, or maybe our station in life.⁵

As disciples, we all have our general call to follow Jesus. We all are to speak grace and have the heart of Christ: love God and love neighbor. Bear the fruit of the Spirit. Keep God's commands.

But there are also the more specific ways of joining in God's work. There are more specific ways of "being in mission." Maybe God has blessed you with special talents, or a caring disposition. Maybe God wants you to organize a project or offer hospitality, or maybe work with someone who needs assistance. The list is endless. General call, missional call.⁶

Closing Invitation

⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁶ Ibid., 23.

I think before his death Don Smith told us that he was always trying to figure out what God wanted him to do when he grew up! I like that.

He was not talking about a lifestyle here, or about making a living, but rather digging into what matters! What makes us tick?! What do we find important? How can we help others? That's really what the finding your mission is about.

Mission, and Faith-Promise Missions Giving, is about paying attention and listening to the Voice that says, "Come over and help us. Come and see what the Spirit of Christ is doing. Follow me."

When we listen and follow that Voice, we never know what God has in store for us! We will never know what door God will open.

Therefore, my final question: why not test the Spirit and see what happens? Why not pay attention and listen to what the Voice of Christ is saying? Your mission is waiting!

Amen.