

Longing and Grace
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz
Date: May 1, 2016

12:22

"Longing and Grace" Pilgrim Church UCC, Sixth Sunday of Easter, (Acts 16:9-15) May 1, 2016

Paul's Vision, Lydia's Longing, and God's Grace

-We heard about Paul a few weeks ago (Road to Damascus), now we see him in action.

-Another vision: a man asking for Paul's help in Macedonia.

-Settle in at Philippi. On the Sabbath, they go down by the river as it's a place of prayer. Paul and his friends encounter some women gathered there, including Lydia.

-Lydia: independent, successful business woman, dealer in purple cloth (luxury good), probably had a high socio-economic status. Lydia runs her own household, makes her way alone in a man's world.

-Lydia comes to worship at that river because she is longing for something more in her life, something beyond the success in the business world she's achieved.

-Lydia is transformed, asks Paul and his friends to baptize her entire household. Offers Paul hospitality to stay at her house as he continued to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

-Remember Paul was supposed to be in Macedonia answering the man's plea in his vision. Instead he encounters an independent, successful business woman who had been seeking God all along.

-Lydia's longing met with God's grace. After her baptism into the faith and family of Jesus Christ, she offers Christian hospitality. Once again, God defies our expectations.[1]

Human Obedience Meets Divine Initiative

-In this story, human obedience meets divine initiative. God is at work in surprising ways!

-UCC Minister Eric Elnes speaks of spending summers working in a salmon cannery in Alaska to pay for college. The hours were brutal but in just 6-7 weeks he could make enough money to cover college costs (combined with financial aid, student loans, and modest help from his parents.)

-The summer before his senior year, the salmon apparently decided to go on vacation. The cannery sent him home early and even with odd jobs he only had \$1,200 of the \$8,000 needed.

-Walking along the bluffs he would cry out to God that he needed a miracle, he felt lost and scared. Three days before he was to leave, he stood on the bluffs yelling at God and heard the still small voice of God in his heart saying, "You're asking me for the wrong thing. Don't ask for the money. Don't ask for a cheap trick to avoid defeat. Ask instead for assurance that I, whom you love so well, love you back, and that I will be there for you just as much in defeat as in victory." [2]

-Changed his outlook, realized he wanted God's presence even more than he wanted to finish college. Elnes went back to the cannery and heard about an open job at another salmon cannery in Southeastern Alaska and felt compelled to spend his little money on a plane ticket to see if he might get that job. He did, and the salmon showed up. Working every day from 6:30 am-1:30 or 2:30am he returned to college with \$9,600.

-Felt like a miracle--not that he found the money, but that he received quiet assurance from God that became a defining moment in his life. For the last 30 years, that moment has served as a pivotal point on his faith journey. Sometimes the best way forward is to stand still and let God find us.

-Sometimes human obedience (whether that's making your way to Macedonia in Paul's case, showing up at a river with an open heart in Lydia's case, or yelling for God's help on the bluffs of Alaska in Eric Elnes' case) meets divine initiative. And our lives will never be the same!

[1] Ronald Cole-Turner, Commentary on Acts 16:9-15, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2,

[2] Eric Elnes, Gifts of the Dark Wood: Seven Blessings for Soulful Skeptics (and other Wanderers), 92-93.