

Date: May 1, 2015  
Scriptures: Psalms 67.; Acts 16:9-15  
Title: Led by God's Vision

Recently I read wisdom comes  
from the marriage of knowledge and experience.  
That description of wisdom rings true for me.  
Through the years,  
I have learned  
that when standing before two doors  
and trying to choose between them,  
it is best not to choose too quickly  
or push too hard on the door  
I want to open.

When I was younger  
and found myself in that situation,  
I would frequently  
push and push and keep on pushing  
against the door I wanted to open.

I can be like a dog with a bone,  
and yes, sometimes  
with great effort and perseverance,  
I did manage to open the door.

But, I frequently discovered to my chagrin  
that the outcome was far less than stellar  
and sometimes was absolutely awful.

Garth Brooks has it right  
when he sings,  
"Some of God's greatest gifts  
are unanswered prayers."

Conversely, I have found time and again  
that the doors I struggled against going through  
or went through kicking and screaming  
often had the very best outcomes.

Oftentimes,  
those much resisted  
and to-be-avoided-at-all cost doors  
showered me with blessing upon blessing.

Wisdom is choosing rightly,  
knowing what to accept and what to change  
and always choosing the most life giving option

not just for ourselves  
but for the wider community also.

After his encounter with the risen Christ  
on the Damascus Road in 36 CE,  
Paul went into seclusion for about two years.  
Following his retreat,  
he preached for about nine years  
in and around Syria and Cilicia,  
which today is southeastern Turkey.

In 48CE, Paul undertook  
his first missionary journey with Barnabas.  
This trip took him from Antioch  
to the coast of Southern Turkey  
and up into south central Turkey to Lystra.

Everywhere they went,  
Paul preached the good news of God's love  
as revealed through Christ  
and started house churches.

After a year, Paul retraced his steps  
and returned to Antioch  
where he continued his church planting ways.

Paul undertook his second missionary journey in 51CE.  
Again, he started out in Antioch  
with his traveling companion, Silas,  
and headed to Turkey.

Once there, they journeyed to Lystra  
visiting the churches  
Paul had planted along the way.

At Lystra, they met Timothy,  
the son of a Jewish Christian,  
who was married to a Greek.

When Paul saw that Timothy was held in high esteem  
by his brothers and sisters in Christ,  
he invited him to journey with them.

Having come to spread the good news,  
Paul began looking for a new mission field.  
He first turned toward Phrygia and Galatia  
in north central Turkey,

but the Spirit bolted the door against them.  
Then, he sought to go into Bithynia  
on Turkey's northwest coast.  
That time the Spirit of Jesus would not let him enter.  
Interesting, Paul did not stubbornly insist  
on trying to open either of those doors.  
Instead he heeded the Spirit's directive  
and turned northwest to Troas  
on the Mediterranean Sea.  
This time the Spirit opened the door  
and allowed them to enter.  
Soon after arriving in Troas,  
Paul had a vision in the night of a man in Macedonia  
entreating them  
"to come over and help them."  
Paul understood that vision to be Christ's call  
for them to preach the gospel in Macedonia,  
which is present day Greece.  
Immediately, the three boarded a ship  
and sailed for Greece's northeast coastline.  
When they disembarked,  
they were the first missionaries  
to ever set foot on European soil.

Although the men were unaware of it at the time,  
God had begun a historic new work  
through them.

*(Grace Commentary International, [www.gci.org/bible/acts16](http://www.gci.org/bible/acts16)).*

It happened because they were willing  
to heed God's directives.  
They did not stubbornly insist  
on pushing against closed doors  
in an effort to open them.  
Neither did they give up in frustration.  
Instead, they kept searching  
for the door that would open.  
When they found it,  
they faithfully and thankfully went through it.  
They had the wisdom  
to accept what they could not change  
and to change what they could.  
Always their response moved

toward blessing not bane.

Soon after landing,  
the three missionaries headed inland.  
The first town they reached was Philippi.  
It was a bustling, prosperous town,  
partly because it was on the main road  
between Europe and Asia Minor,  
partly because of the nearby gold and silver mines.  
As Paul did in every town he entered,  
he went looking for the synagogue  
on the Sabbath.  
The synagogue was his mission field,  
the place where he talked with people  
about God's revelation in Christ Jesus.  
Not finding a synagogue in the city,  
he went outside the city gate.  
There, *outside the city*  
near the river,  
he and the other two missionaries  
found a place of prayer.

We don't know  
if this place of worship  
were a synagogue or only an open air enclosure.  
A group of women had gathered there.  
The three missionaries sat down,  
which indicated they were going to teach,  
and Paul began to speak.  
We are not told what Paul said to the women,  
but he must have spoken  
passionately and convincingly  
for God used his words  
to open Lydia's heart.

Lydia was an outlier,  
different from most of the women of her day.  
She owned her own extremely profitable business.  
She was a seller of purple cloth,  
a highly prized and expensive commodity.  
To sell it required a license;

to wear it required permission.  
She was independent,  
the head of her household,  
which was composed of the women,  
who worked for her.  
Lastly, she was a God-fearer, a Jewish proselyte.  
who listened to God's word for her life.  
Hearing Paul speak about God's love  
revealed in Christ Jesus,  
Lydia asked Paul to baptize her.  
That very same day she  
and all in her household were baptized.  
Afterward, Lydia invited Paul and his companions  
to stay at her home.  
Paul accepted her gracious hospitality  
used it as a base for his first missionary activities  
in Europe.

Unbeknownst to us,  
God is at work in and through each of our lives.  
At the very same time,  
God was opening and closing doors  
to bring Paul to Philippi,  
God was also opening and closing doors  
to bring Lydia to the place  
where she could respond to Paul's message.  
It is a beautiful example  
of God's synchronicity in our lives  
and helps us see that closed doors  
need to remain closed  
and opened doors  
need to be walked through.  
All God needs is our faithfulness  
and acceptance of God's guidance  
to do a good work through us.

(Cole-Turner, *Theological Perspective, Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 2*, p. )

The question before us this morning is,  
"How is God working in our lives,  
both individually and collectively as the body of Christ?"  
What is God accomplishing in and through us

for the up building of God's kingdom?  
What is it that God wants to accomplish in and through us  
but can't because we are unwilling or uncertain?  
We are not put on this earth for ourselves only,  
for our own personal satisfaction and salvation.  
That was never God's sole intention  
for us or the world.

Yes, God does want us to grow  
in wisdom and knowledge,  
but God also wants all Gods children  
to grow in wisdom and knowledge.

Yes, God does want to bless us,  
but God also wants to bless all people.  
And the world does not always strive to do that.

The world is myopic, and we are myopic.  
So, God sends the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of Jesus,  
to come and make his home in us  
and nudge us outside the city gate,  
outside the establishment,  
outside our comfort zone.

We, God's children, and we, the body of Christ  
". . . are here to offer a different way of life,  
a different story,  
a different promise."

To do that, we have to live the vision  
God's vision, not ours.

Amen.