

Easter 7  
May 8, 2016

Text: Acts 16:6-10

Theme: God Has Called Us To Preach The Gospel

1. He Opens Doors
2. We Walk Through Those Doors

It's been said that when God closes a door he opens a window. That's a phrase that was popularized in the musical *Sound of Music*. And Rodgers and Hammerstein may have drawn their inspiration from a similar saying by Alexander Graham Bell or perhaps Helen Keller. It's not Biblical in the sense that there is no such quote in Scripture. However, we do see examples of that thought over the course of Bible History. None more apparent than here in Acts where we see that **God opens doors** since **He has called us to preach the gospel**.

Whatever you think of the Apostle Paul, one thing is sure, he carried out an exciting ministry. The shipwrecks, imprisonments, and persecutions, which some would argue are not truly exciting notwithstanding, after he was called and sent by God to preach the gospel to Gentiles, Paul traveled far and wide to proclaim that message. Think of the places that he visited. On his first missionary journey, he traveled to island of Cyprus, and to Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, towns in modern day Turkey. Now on his second journey he revisits many of those places and desires to venture further in to that region that is now Turkey, to continue to share the gospel. But God who called him to preach, closed that particular door to him.

Aside from the fact that Paul went over to Troas on the Aegean Sea, we don't know what Paul's ultimately had in mind. But while he was there, God opened a door to Macedonia, in modern-day Greece. **After 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.** Paul was devoted to that mission which was given him by God. Whatever he was going to do and wherever he would be led, it would serve to preach the gospel. There in Macedonia his ministry would be blessed in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, before heading on to Athens and beyond.

In 1871, with a total world population of somewhere between 1 and 1.5 billion people and a city of Elkhorn population that was flourishing with right around 1,200 residents, a few of those German residents wanted to start a church. In the early years they were served by a Lutheran pastor by the name of Heinrich Duborg, who came from Whitewater every third Sunday to serve them. God had opened a door here in Elkhorn. When the founders of the congregation were asked why they wanted to start another church when there were already Baptist, Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches in this town of 1200, the founding members responded by quoting from John 8:31-32, **Then said Jesus to those Jews which believe on him, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.** God has called us to preach the gospel in its truth and purity and so for the last 145 years, we've existed and proclaimed the truth in Elkhorn and supported its proclamation around the world. But we dare not rest on our laurels and history as fond of it as we may be. Ministry is an active thing that must be owned by each generation to move it forward.

Over the years our congregation hasn't stood still or been satisfied. We've looked for the doors that God was opening to our ministry. From our original building on Geneva Street to the move to this campus and the starting of the school and the narthex expansion and gymnasium project, God has certainly opened doors for our ministry too. But the most important doors aren't about physical plant are the opportunities to share Jesus, his perfect life and his innocent death for us and all people in Elkhorn and beyond. First Lutheran has been a faithful outpost for the gospel for 145 years. We've walked through one open door after another to spread the truth of his word and God has blessed that ministry.

Where is the next door that will open for us? Working together with our synod, we are opening 8 new home missions, places where that same gospel message that gives us reason to rejoice and sing can be proclaimed so that still more can come to know Jesus their Savior. This coming weekend and the following, new pastor and teacher

candidates, including our own member, Cassie Schwark, will be assigned to fields of service to proclaim the gospel and tell the wonders of God. Praise God with me for his blessings to our church.

What more can we do? Can we expand our preschool program down to younger levels to meet the changing social, cultural and educational needs of the twenty-first century and share the gospel of Jesus with more children and their families? Can we increase our outreach to the community? Can we increase our support for our synod which continues to carry Jesus to places we ourselves cannot go and provide the gospel to others where God is opening doors? Can we encourage young men and women of the congregation to consider full-time gospel ministry so that we can enter the doors God is opening to us around the world? At this time, there are 90 pastoral vacancies in our church body. That sounds like a lot. And historically for our synod it is quite high. But it's not unhealthy as it provides opportunities for movement and change where such might be necessary. But the need remains for young men to consider whether God might be opening a door to them to use the gifts and talents he gives in full-time service in his kingdom. We should encourage and support them as they do so.

Each of those options and more are open to us at this moment, limited only by our commitment and desire to do so. It's easy to become complacent. It's easy to become protectionist about our own time and resources. It's easy to leave it to someone else. But, you and I have been entrusted with the truth of God's Word. It is the one unifying theme for us who come from different backgrounds, ethnicities, educational experiences, and upbringings. But the truth of God's Word hasn't changed. We illustrated in the children's lesson what happens to the gospel when we aren't all on the same page, singing the same song so to speak. When there is no unity, the work of the church suffers. But Jesus said, **May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.** That is the mission he's entrusted to us – that united in truth and acting in love we might preach the Gospel. And when we carry out that mission, God continues to open doors, bless our work and extend his kingdom.