

Are You Ready (What Are You Doing Here?) Acts 6:6-15

Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV Sixth Sunday of Easter (May 1) 2016

NARRATOR: Paul and Timothy went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying:

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Come over to Macedonia and help us.

NARRATOR: And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately he and Timothy sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel to the people of Macedonia.

PAUL: Timothy and I set sail from Troas and we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

TIMOTHY: One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying:

LYDIA: If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.

TIMOTHY: And she prevailed upon us.

It was just “another night,” this April 23, when Samuel Ives took his shift working in the Portland Lighthouse. He was a Maine Civil Defense volunteer, doing his civic duty, spending eight hours in the top-side of the great lighthouse on the rocks of Portland, overlooking the harbor. His job: be on the lookout for German U-Boats – submarines.

He was as alert as you can be when you spend hours watching a rolling ocean, blue upon blue. He saw the little boat, the USS Eagle 56 out to sea, heading in toward the harbor. The Eagle was a small sea vessel, only 200 feet long with a crew of 67 seamen. Samuel was peering through binoculars at the Eagle, when he thought he saw a disturbance off to the side. He turned the binoculars to look, but couldn't see anything to have disturbed his peripheral vision. And then ... then, helplessly, he watched as he saw the seaborne tunnel, like a groundhog on speed, racing toward the little Eagle. He didn't have to wait for long, until he saw the initial impact, and subsequent fireball, as the torpedo hit the side of the ship.

There was a German U-Boat out there close. The USS Eagle 56 could not survive this deadly attack.

Samuel got on the radio, and immediately sounded the alarm. He spoke to another Maine Civil Defense volunteer, a man he later learned was named Harold Petherbridge.

Petherbridge didn't speak very much to Sam Ives then. He got the basic information and then began his alert protocol. Search and rescue was activated. Then search and destroy.

Later on, Harold Petherbridge and Sam Ives would get together on numerous occasions and discuss what happened after that first radio contact, on April 23, 1945. They were civilians, not military. This was the first time – and just a few weeks before the terrible war would end – that they had encountered the horrors of war. An American destroyer eventually caught the German U-Boat, known simply as U-853, and sank it off the coast of Block Island, Rhode Island, on May 7. Today, that submerged submarine, in only 123 feet of water depth, is a popular diving attraction, even though it remains a watery tomb for its 55 crew members.

Only thirteen of the sixty-seven Eagle crew members were eventually rescued. Survivors of torpedoed ships go through

their own special kind of torture, and back then PTSD was known, but not by name.

Seaman First Class, Gunner's Mate, Jack Wentz knew one thing, after he was rescued. When taken to the famous American-charity Rescue station, he was required to pay for a cup of coffee. And he was required to **call collect** to let his mother back home (who had been told he had gone down with the ship) that he was alive. The one thing he knew was that he would never give one red cent to that charity for the rest of his life. And he never did.

The events of that night brought Sam Ives and Harold Petherbridge together. They often shared their memories of what happened, over coffee or in venues other than coffee shops. It may have been that very fatal torpedo attack that formed a friendship between them, which led to their children Samuel Clifton Ives and Jane Petherbridge, to a friendship and then courtship and finally marriage. Cliff Ives has been known to name his wife, Jane, as his secret ingredient that led to him being elected as a Bishop in the United Methodist Church, in July 1992.

It was one month later, in August 1992, when the daughter of torpedoed boat survivor Jack Wentz, also being named Jane, bid her husband adieu, as he departed from home to begin a second career, going to seminary, and to later have Bishop Samuel Clifton Ives lay his hands upon his head for ordination. He always said that his wife had much to do with his hearing the call to ordained ministry, to go to seminary.

It was eleven years later, in July 2003, when that same Bishop Ives would appoint Jane Brown's husband to serve as senior pastor of Saint Marks United Methodist Church, in Charleston, West Virginia. It was eleven years after that when the two Browns would visit the two Ives, now living in retirement in Portland, Maine.

Cliff and Jane took Monty and Jane to visit "their" lighthouse in Portland. It was when Monty began to paint a picture, and to do research about, that lighthouse, that he learned about U-238 and the USS Eagle 56.

So, in the midst of painting this picture [display] he came to realize how special are the events that connect to bring us to where we are.

I freely confess that some literary license was used to connect the dots in the preceding illustration. But, such was not the case in the account we heard about Paul and Timothy and Lydia ... and the “Man from Macedonia” who called Paul to come there.

How special are the events that connect to bring us to where we are!

Macedonia was the first missionary stop of Paul and Timothy in Europe. It opened the door for the Gospel of Jesus Christ moving from Asia to Europe. It opened the door for you and me to receive the Gospel that we now claim for our salvation.

It almost did not happen – Lydia’s and Paul’s meeting there at the riverside.

Recall for a moment all of the contingencies of history, that long list of improbable events that led to Lydia’s encounter with Paul. Think back to the controversy in the early church over the taking of the Good News to the Gentiles (Acts 15) or how Paul had to be nudged and redirected again and again to get him to Philippi (Acts 16:1-8.) It was not enough for the Spirit to guide

Paul and Timothy. Twice the text tells us that the Spirit prevented Paul from going the wrong way (16:6-7) ***We can only imagine*** what it is like to have the experience of the Holy Spirit stopping us from doing something. (**Or, perhaps, it is “remembering” rather than “imagining”?**)

It almost did not happen, this meeting of the businesswoman and the missionaries, and it surely would not have happened were it not for the inexplicable convergence of human faithfulness and divine guidance.

It was the Spirit who brought Lydia and Paul together. But **THAT** is only half of what is required. True, Lydia must first have heard the words of good news, and to do that she had to meet Paul. She must also have heard the words as TRUTH, as GOSPEL, as the ANSWER TO HER SEARCH. It was the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ who prepared her heart to hear, receive and understand.

BUT HERE is the CENTER OF THE STORY, the moment of intersection between human obedience and divine initiative.

God opened her heart, and ***immediately she opened her home***. Without any hesitation, she was baptized and turned her

house into a base for the spread of Christianity in Europe.

What is remarkable is how decisive Lydia was.

Unlike so many of us, she saw the truth before her and decided what course to take, and then she did it.

- No committee meeting.
- No mulling it over for as long as it takes for the impulse to die from lack of attention.
- No chewing it over and over and over until there is nothing left.

Lots of things had to come together to bring us to where we are today. Lots of roads taken and lots of choices opted out. But, notwithstanding the history – HERE WE ARE.

What are YOU doing HERE?

We are not gifted just to be spectators.

Being a Christian requires us to take action. Decisive Action.

What are YOU doing HERE?

- Is there something God has brought you to this point in life to do?

- Have you taken time to listen?
- To be quiet and actually listen?
- Can you wrap your head (and heart) around the notion that YOU ARE IMPORTANT to God's Plan?

And it involves you DOING SOMETHING.

It's true. It really is. God wants YOU – not just the person next to you, or two pews behind you – God wants YOU to do something for God's Kingdom.

So, this week, when you call or text, and when you are called or receive your text message, the reminder will be simple:

What Are You Doing Here?

The appropriate response to your reminder is to simply say **"Thank you."** And the appropriate response to listening to that call will be: **"Here I am, Lord. Send me."**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.