

So some of you might know: I'm new here. I have been here for just over two weeks with my family and here are some things I've learned about Albuquerque: Menaul is a pretty good way to get to where I need to go, the Sunport is quaint, and you can buy tortillas and beer in the grocery stores here! Amazing! Traveling does that to you. It forces you to take on a new perspective, to see things with new eyes, whether your journey is for a few days for many years. I think that's why so. Many biblical stories feature some sort of travel: Abram and Sarai leaving their home, the Israelites wandering for 40 years, the holy family escaping to Egypt, and the disciples going on a fishing excursion after their rabbi is gone.

And today we hear the story of probably the most well-traveled of the saints, Paul. You can flip through the letters he left behind to see a reconstruction of his itinerary: Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Colossi, and so on. Today we hear another describe one of Paul's travels from the book of Acts. Paul and his companion Silas had been trying to get to Asia, the place where they had thought they were being sent, but God repeatedly diverts them away so they wind up in Troas. Imagine your GPS resetting again and again, recalculating, recalculating. And then Paul receives a vision: "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And off they go on the best road trip by sea in the adventures of St. Paul: "We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony." They wind up where they are supposed to be and instead of heading to the local synagogue, Paul and Silas wind up, led by the Spirit, outside the city gates, by the river's edge, and instead of a Macedonian man, they find a foreign woman, a colonist, a dealer in purple cloth, Lydia.

And she already worships God! She hears eagerly the good news of this Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ who takes away the sin of the world, and she and her entire household are baptized. This is important. She is not who Paul expected, I think, to meet when he stepped off that boat, she is an outsider, a woman of means who controlled a business and a household. And now she is baptized and what is her first act as a child of God? She prevails upon these men who supposedly had been sent to help Macedonians, to help her and her household, and she echoes back that offer of good news, the newborn faithfulness in her heart, and welcomes them, maybe even forcefully. Think of that woman you know who will not relent until you eat just one more plate of food. She made Paul and Silas immediately receive the gifts of the Spirit that send them all along this way on the trip to Macedonia. This journey was not smooth, was not predictable, and yet was accompanied the entire way by the Spirit who went with the ship along its way and with the woman who sold purple cloth.

And Jesus today is preparing for a journey in our reading from John's Gospel today. Jesus knows his travels will lead to the cross, that he will soon leave these disciples that love him so alone and with no shepherd to guide them. And so he's leaving behind what he can: his words. We know these words: "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Maybe you've heard these at a funeral, or at a time of departure, or when one pastor goes and another pastor or two comes along. These words were meant for disciples about to enter into the week we remember as the Passion, to see their lives they expected come fraying apart as their teacher and friend was hung on a tree. Jesus gives them these words as comfort along the journey he knows will continue forward of his followers.

So that means you too. Jesus says these words to you and to me this day: I'm sending you the Advocate, to speak up when you are quiet. I'm leaving you with the gift of update, something to treasure by sharing with those here and not yet here. I'm giving you this not like the world, expecting a return on my investment, but simply because I love you. Don't let your hearts be troubled and don't be afraid. Last night, Pastor Doug led worship, and today Pastor Ryan and I are here. Pastor Russ was here, Pastor Beth and Pastor Travis too, and your hearts may yet still be troubled. What will these new pastors do? Do they like the way things are? Are they going to change everything I hold dear in this community? Why is her nose pierced? My heart is there too: Will they like us? Will they disparage us for our youth? Will I ever get the hang of the weekly calendar? Will we get faster internet in the office soon? What's the door code again? But that's the point. God knows us, Jesus loves us, and the Spirit is here with us, repeating these words again to us as a refrain we need to hear again. We need to hear "Don't let your hearts be troubled" before we can hear the cry "Come over here and help us!"

But we do have places to go, places where God is sending us. The Spirit has guided two pastors from Baltimore to come to Albuquerque, and that tells me God has a plan for us here at St. Luke and the Spirit is ready for our departure. We're not going to be going to Macedonia. Ok, with 99% confidence I can say that. But where might we set sail with the Spirit leading the way? Maybe to partnerships new and renewed with our preschool, with our immediate neighbors, with our fellow ELCA congregations or campus ministry. Maybe we're being called to stand with those outside the city gate, those we least expect to be worshipers of God. Maybe our sisters and brothers who flee to this country as refugees and unaccompanied minors, LGBTQ folks burned and broken by hate wrapped up in a Christian message, or the homeless and working poor who eke out an existence on the margins of our awareness.

We are given these words from John and Acts not simply as reminders, but as our marching orders as followers of Christ. Professor Eric Barretto writes this: As the church, “We ought to follow God's call to reach across cultural and ethnic boundaries and learn to find opportunities to do God's work in unexpected places.” Today is the launch point of that new voyage, an exciting adventure, as pastors and lectors, Sunday school teachers and sound engineers, little kids and those who never grew up, to all shove off from the safe harbor to places unexpected and unknown, not knowing where we'll land, but absolutely confident that God the creator sends us, Jesus our brother feeds us along the way, and the Spirit fills our sails with breath to carry us where we are most certainly being sent.