



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 20, 2007  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Acts 16:6-10  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 16:6-10  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 8  
Second Lesson: Revelation 22:12-17, 20  
Gospel: John 17:20-26

### God Guides Godly Conclusions

Comfort—comfort is a big word in our lives, isn't it. If we get worried or anxious about something, what do we do? Run right to those comfort foods, right? They make us feel a little better. Talk about finding shoes that are comfortable—when we get home in our dress clothes, what is one of the first things we do? We take them off because we think they are uncomfortable just because we don't wear them all that often. If you eat a big meal, what do you do? Loosen your belt so you can be comfortable. There are a lot of things in our lives that seem to revolve around being comfortable.

But you know what? As you and I serve our Lord and Savior, there is going to have to be times when we just aren't all that comfortable. So we better get comfortable with being uncomfortable because as we go about serving our Lord, there are going to be times when we are going to have to do things that are going to be outside of our comfort zone. You never know when the Lord might put you next to someone that you are talking with who doesn't know their Savior and the Lord wants you to talk to them about it. That might be outside your comfort zone. Or you have a good friend you went to school with and got confirmed with and now they have drifted away from the Lord. Maybe the Lord wants you to be the one that says, "What you are doing is wrong. Turn back to God. Turn away from your sin." I guarantee that is out of your comfort zone. We are a lot more comfortable talking about what other people should be doing when they aren't present, aren't we? But now talking to them directly—that puts a little bit outside of our comfort zone.

In our life as Christians, as individuals, and a congregation, if we never leave our comfort zone, we probably aren't going to do anything in the kingdom of God. We are probably going to sit on our spiritual couches all of our life and say, "Lord bless me." But not stretch ourselves to serve our Lord. So there is going to have to be some time in our life where we are stretching ourselves to serve our God and God says to us, "You know what? That isn't the direction that I want you to go. Right now, that's no." But then eventually he shows us exactly where he wants us to go.

Yesterday I had the privilege of being in New Ulm, Minnesota for Call Day, Assignment Day, or Graduation. Talk about a lot of people outside of their comfort zone sitting in a folding chair waiting for someone to tell you where you are going to spend your life—that is a little bit outside of your comfort zone. But you know what? God says, "Go." Maybe to some yesterday he said, "No. Not yet." But God guides us to Godly conclusions in how we are going to serve him in our life. What he asks us to do is get up off the spiritual couch and start serving him. And then trust him to guide us.

Isn't that exactly what we read about in the Book of Acts? It sounds like a bunch of names of towns that you have never been to that you probably don't want to try to pronounce. How would you like to grow up saying you grew up in Phrygia? It doesn't sound like a thing you want to put on your return address the rest of your life. Yet, that is where they were going because God had said "no" to going into the province of Asia where they wanted to go. Where they thought "This is the best way we can serve God." God said "no." So they have to wander around through Phrygia and Galatia. Then they want to go into the province of Asia—another Roman province in Asia Minor—but when they came to the border of Mysia, they wanted to go in Bithynia, and God wouldn't allow them to.

Over and over they had their plans and God had said, "No. That is not the direction I want you to go right now. You have to go over in this direction." The guidance didn't always come right away, but God eventually got them to where he wanted them to be. But sometimes when they wanted to serve the Lord, when they wanted to tell others who Jesus was and what he had done for them, God had to say, "Not here. Not now. It's not for you." Did that ever happen to you in your life? Were there things you had your heart set on but God said, "Not here. Not now"?

I went to high school and college with a young man whose greatest desire in the world was to be a pastor. That is what he had wanted to be (he had said) from the time he was little on. He worked his tail off. He worked and worked and worked and slugged away at learning Hebrew vocables when the rest of us would go out on the town. He would stay home and study, because he wanted to get good grades, because he wanted to be a pastor. He got decent grades. But when it came time to be recommended to the seminary, God said to him "not here and not now" because he didn't have the gifts and abilities that God lays out in Scripture to become a pastor. It broke his heart. The last time I talked to him he had found other ways to serve his Lord faithfully in congregations, but what he had wanted, God had said "no" to.

Maybe you grew up and said I want to be this or I want to do that or you wanted to serve in God's kingdom by teaching. I had people in Minnesota that really wanted to share the Gospel with little children. They wanted to teach kids, but they didn't have the gifts and ability to necessarily teach children. God said to them "no." So they found other ways where they could serve. They helped out in our Sunday school by supporting other people in the Sunday school so that those who had the gifts of teaching could teach.

There are a lot of times in our lives when we want to do something. We have our heart set on it, but God says to us "no," and we don't always know why. We don't always get an immediate vision from God that says "no, I want you over here." But one of the great truths we need to learn as we go through our life serving God is that we need to just trust God. If God doesn't let us do what we want when we want, trust him. It should be easy for us to trust him, shouldn't it? This is the guy who lived in our place, died in our place, took away all of our sins, opened the door to heaven to us and says, "I am with you always. I love you. There is no doubt. Here is my Word. Here is the water. Here is the wafer and the wine. I am going to say it to you over and over. I love you. I have

forgiven you. Pay attention to this!" Yet, there are times when we don't trust God because we have our heart set on something. But sometimes God says "no" to us and he has perfectly good reasons for it. We don't always know why. Maybe it's because he wants us to be a blessing to someone else.

I know someone sitting in these pews that once said the one thing they would never do is marry someone with blue eyes. And they also said they would never marry someone who is a pastor. Well, God said "no" to that advice, and Paula married someone with blue eyes and someone that's a pastor. It's worked out really well for me!

We don't always know what's best for us, but our God does. He works in ways that we just don't understand. Maybe you are here this morning because you have a kid that is going to be in the play or a grandkid in the play, or you are here for a cool baptism this morning and you are thinking "I just have to endure that and I can get on with the rest of my day." Maybe you are saying "no" to really even wanting to be here this morning. But maybe God has you here because he wants you to hear that he loves you. He's taken away your sin. He's promised to be with you, and he wants you to walk close with him. He wants you to first of all come close to him and know the intense love and forgiveness that takes away your sins—not your efforts, not your being here. That does nothing to take away those sins. But he says to you, "It's my free gift. Whoever is thirsty, let him come. Let him take the free gift of the water of life" is what we heard Jesus say in our Second Lesson. That free gift of the water of life is what washes away our sins and tells us that he has done it all and that we are his children. It's not some impractical thing that is just kind of nice and cute for kids. It touches us every day of our lives as we go through those things that make us say, "I don't know. Should I go here? Should I go there? Should I do this? Should I do that?" Or, "I don't know what is going to happen next" when tragedy enters our lives. When we say "no, I don't want any of this Lord"—God wants each and every one of us to know that he is there, and he is there in his love for us. He is there to be with us. He is there to sustain us. Eventually he says to us, "Here is where I want you to go."

He eventually had Paul and his companions, Luke and the others, go to Macedonia and bring the Gospel to a whole new continent. They went over to Macedonia and they preached and they established congregations. The Word of God spread like wildfire because the Holy Spirit was let loose through these people that served faithfully.

You might not get to serve the way you want, but God has put you in a place in time so that you can serve him. If you know the message of Salvation, maybe later today, maybe later this week, maybe later this month, maybe later this year, he'll set you down next to someone who is troubled, who is hurting, and if you are listening for his voice to say "go, talk about your Savior here and now," he'll use you. The Spirit will work through you and you'll see someone else realize that they have a God who loves them intensely, directly and eternally.

I tell you what. There is no greater joy in the world than to be the instrument that God uses to share the Gospel with someone else. It's worth everything else that you endure in life—the persecution, the laughing, the ridicule that comes in large measures or

small. It's worth it all when you get to tell someone that Jesus loves them and the Spirit leads them to believe that. There is no cooler feeling on this side of heaven.

Someone might not say to you directly, "Come over to Macedonia and help us," but keep your eyes open and maybe the Lord will show you. That is individually. As a congregation, we ought to be failing at times. We ought to try something that doesn't work. We ought to be trying things that God has to say to us "No. That's not what I want you to do right here and right now." If we aren't failing at times, we probably aren't trying enough. We aren't reaching out with the Gospel enough. We aren't saying the Gospel is this important and we have to not be afraid to fail. We have to step forward and tell God to show us what he wants us to do, even if we get pie on our faces whenever we screw up, until we get it right. We should say, "Lord, show us. Show us which way to go."

God will do that. He did it yesterday for a number of those Graduates. He has done it for us in bringing us here this morning, so take home the message of the Gospel. Take it to your heart now, but live it every day of the week and share it.