

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως  
Easter 6-C; 26 May 2019  
St. Thomas, Glassboro – Todd Foster  
(rev. 201905251440)

## Mission from God

*In nomine...*

### I. Intro

Do you remember the original Blues Brothers movie from 1980? Amid all the incredible musical performances, one line of dialog that stands out for its audacity is when Elwood asserts they are on a “mission from God.” Even the first time I saw the movie I was a little shocked: how did they jump from a tax bill to a divine calling? That’s the kind of confidence I want as I strive to discern God’s calling in *my* life!

Our first reading today showcases that process of discernment and calling, detailing just one of many events in the life of St. Paul, and of a business-woman named Lydia.

### IIa. Thesis: Paul

First Paul. Paul was traveling around the Roman Empire, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, walking a high-stakes line between Jewish and Gentile communities. He had companions in his travels, and together they were figuring things out as they went along. One night, in the city of Troas in far western Turkey, Paul has a dream that he should go proclaim his Gospel to a man in Macedonia. So the next morning Paul sets out: on a mission from God.

When Paul and his companions get to a town called Philippi, they find a very Roman city: there’s not even a formal synagogue there, so their usual M.O. isn’t going to work. But they see a raggedy community notice in coded language posted in a dusty corner of an ethnic market: there is a group that meets outside the city gates to pray each Sabbath. So when Sabbath comes, that’s where they go.

Back in Chicago, Joliet Jake has just finished a lengthy prison term and they’re putting the band back together. It’s been years since they’ve played, so they’re starting over like they’re new in the city. Jake and Elwood promised an audience, but they don’t actually have any connections

to get one. So they stop at a random, campy little bar outside of town. It's not a blues bar. When Jake asks what kind of music is usually played at the bar, the waitress helpfully says: "Oh, we have both kinds! Country AND Western!" This is not the typical repertoire of the Blues Brothers. But they can adapt: they play the theme from the TV show Rawhide in the key of "A, good Country key." They're on a mission of God and they're going to adapt to what they find.

In Philippi, Paul and his companions stroll just outside of town on a Sabbath and indeed discover a community gathered for prayer. But there's no Macedonian man. It's a group of women. They're not Jewish. They're not even locals! Lydia, the one who seems to be leading this group, is from Thyatira, which is back where Paul just came from in western Turkey! This is not the scenario Paul thought he was called to in his dream. But Paul is on a mission from God, so he adapts to what he finds before him and proclaims the Gospel of Christ.

### **Iib. Thesis: Lydia**

And Paul isn't the only hero of our story. What of Lydia? She was a stranger in Philippi herself! Our reading tells us Lydia was a worshiper of God: she's looking for something. Lydia is also a successful business-woman, a dealer in purple cloth who moved to Philippi for the opportunities there. She knows that to be successful in business, she has to be flexible, to adapt, to seize the opportunities she finds before her. So when Lydia hear's Paul's message, she immediately responds to it and re-shapes her life around it. Lydia wants to use her means, such as they are, to support and enable the efforts of these workers for God. She says, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." Lydia, too, is on a mission from God.

Like Lydia, the various members of the Blues Brothers all have different jobs around Chicagoland. Some are playing music, some are working in the kitchen of a family business. How would you like to be the cook in Aretha Franklin's restaurant, with John Lee Hooker playing right outside the doors? But all of these musicians leave their other gigs, with more or less coaxing, when Jake and Elwood come calling and tell them about their mission from God. Because all the musicians know that, in their heart of hearts, playing together is what they really want to do.

### **III. Good News**

What is it that you really want to do? Paul wants to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to those who haven't heard. Lydia wants to encounter God for herself. In our Gospel today, Jesus speaks of the sending of an Advocate to anyone who loves God, the Holy Spirit who will dwell in the hearts of anyone who truly wants to receive her.

Both Paul and Lydia are on a mission from God. Both of them are listening and available to the nudgings of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, that Jesus promised God would send to Jesus' followers.

Jesus did not utter the last words on God's will for people. Instead he promised to send the Holy Spirit who would "teach you everything." Jesus knew and rejoiced that the relationship between God and God's people would continue to be an open, dynamic system as people learned more about relating to God, more about themselves, and more about the constantly changing world around them.

This means Christians can be, like the Blues Brothers, unflappable, ready to move forward no matter what the obstacle. Remember all the opposition Jake and Elwood faced: police, neo-nazis, crazy ex-girlfriends, a tax assessor's lunch break, and even an angry Country & Western band driving around in a Winnebago! But when a building gets blown up around them, all Elwood says is, "It's almost 9 o'clock: I gotta go to work!"

#### **IV. Invitation**

At St. Thomas', we too know we gotta' get to work. Like St. Paul, or even Elwood, we hear the voice of God and follow, confident that, even if we're a little off in the details, God will redirect us into the current of God's will, if only we will remain open and prayerful. That Spirit of confidence and openness and readiness to get to work is the only thing that I can figure that would make St. Thomas' so audacious as to pursue big projects like Kitchen of Hope or Family Promise or even building a massive ramp to make our historical building into more than a museum, but into a living place of welcome for all God's people.

We can do all these things and more because, as a community making decisions together, we have our own "mission from God." A mission to Glassboro and south Jersey, a mission to Rowan University, a mission to our own families and friends and neighbors. No obstacle or setback is fatal: God *will do* God's work and God will not be stymied in it. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, which we have each received in Baptism, by which we, too, participate confidently in our own "mission from God."

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