

SERMON: "THE SPIRIT ... EMPOWERED TO SERVE"

TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT

DEUTERONOMY 34:1-12

NEW TESTAMENT

ACTS 16:6-15

May 25, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

I'm thinking combo platter – classic like soup and sandwich

Turkey club and broccoli cheddar soup, grilled cheese with any soup

Some things are meant to be paired, they go best together

That's how I've been thinking and praying through this sermon

I want to pair a line from the Brief Statement of Faith – "In gratitude to God,
empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks"

and these verses from Acts with the Spirit giving directions

**During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing
and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 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.**

**From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and
the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi,
a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And
we stayed there several days.**

The pulpit and pew bibles have headings that name these verses under two different
titles or descriptions. Think two different paragraphs. The lectionary puts them
together – a combo platter. The first, the soup is about the where to, literally

Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia saying "come here and help us"

So Paul follows the Spirit's lead – he is empowered, directed

One of the things being combined here is that flexibility

Paul lets the Spirit change his itinerary – just like that

He is open to let the Spirit change his plans

Empowered by the Spirit pairs with being open to that Spirit

Can't make a good combo if you're not willing to try something new

Hold onto that will you please. That half of the combo – flexibility, openness

The second, the sandwich, is the conversion of a woman in Macedonia – Lydia.

The combo takes a twist there. Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia
that leads him to a woman, to this woman in particular – to her daily tasks

Yes. The man from Macedonia turns out to be a woman

Got to love how the Spirit leads us, empowers us, changes our directions

A WOMAN FROM MACEDONIA

Let me continue the reading following the Spirit's directions
This is the where to in Macedonia. And the who to

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

The directions that led Paul to Macedonian lead Paul to share his message with these women, to this woman from Macedonia. Lydia.
The bible names her and her work. That is intentional

Here is where I really see the Spirit making a combo, especially with that language from the Brief Statement of Faith about serving Christ in our daily tasks
As a younger preacher, I would have focused just on that openness, that flexibility that willingness to let the Spirit change our directions

But now, especially lately as chemotherapy has slowed my pace considerably
I really see that flexibility paired with regular old daily tasks, our routines
How can I serve Christ at this pace? It's not by trying to force a faster pace
It's about living into the day to day. See Thee more clearly
Love Thee more dearly. Follow Thee more nearly ... day by day

Lydia's day by day included her household which is mentioned.
And her work which is also mentioned – a dealer in purple cloth.
Translation. She is women of money and means, influence
The dyes to make purple cloth were rare. Few people wore purple
Not a college town, no purple panthers. No, purple was for royalty

The mention of her trade in purple is a nudge to think about the daily tasks
not only of our work environment, the work we do and the people we work with
but also the daily tasks of what we do with our money, our influence

I catch myself every once in a while daydreaming about what I'd if I won the lottery
What I could do with all that money. I think of the good I could do
not just what I might buy. Problem is I don't play the lottery
Better to think about the good I can do with what I actually have

As a women of means, Lydia's daily tasks would have a ripple effect.
A pretty big ripple. Your daily tasks do too, your money does too.
Your energies and efforts do make a difference. More than you know
The Spirit will see to that, empower that

DAILY TASKS

We all have our patterns, our routines. Places we go, people we see
That is where the Spirit is empowering us to serve Christ in our daily tasks
Ministry is not just about being sent somewhere, changing course
going on a journey, an adventure. It is just as much about being here
the adventure of the usual Friday grocery store trip, familiar places and faces

Lydia started with small steps. She did things we can do – daily tasks
She listened. Paul met her and the other women at a place of prayer
Those are some very good daily tasks – prayer (including prayer together)
and listening, listening with that openness and flexibility

I get regular emails from organizations committed to supporting pastors and our work
the Ministry Collaborative which started in Atlanta when I was there
whose original name was Macedonian Ministry after these verses and
Leaderwise, a group out of the Twin Cities to name a few
They offer encouragement, some practical tips ... and words of warning

For the past few months now in particular, I have noticed a trend
I get multiple warnings as a faith leader to avoid getting stuck in silos
feedback loops that repeat refrains reinforcing how right we are
and how wrong they are, algorithms designed to tickle our ears
or worse, get our blood boiling. Or both

I think I am getting those warnings because silos always seem to be on sale
because it is easier to talk than to listen, really listen. More and more I love
Jesus' habit of ending a teaching by saying, "Let those who have ears, listen."
From a place of prayer, Lydia listened to Paul
Then she went a step further. She opened her home

She practiced hospitality saying, "Come stay at my house."
And then Luke who wrote Acts and Luke adds ... "She persuaded them."
Interesting addition. It's a unique phrase in the original Greek that he uses
only one other time. And that is when the travelers to Emmaus persuade
or 'prevail upon' Jesus whom they have not yet recognized to stay with them

Isn't ministry in one way or another at its most basic form practicing hospitality?
welcoming someone into our day by day? Inviting them into our lives?
What a great way to be persuasive – not so much by winning an argument
but by winning a friend. Come on in the house ... not the silo.

That sounds doable – listening, practicing hospitality
We can do these things within the context of our day to day
Don't necessarily have to change directions and head to Macedonia
Wonder how many connecting flights and train tickets that would be

These connections are right in front of us. In our daily tasks

SUMMARY

How might you serve Christ in your daily tasks ...

Holding onto that openness and flexibility, willingness to change course
and pairing that with the routine of your routines? A combo platter

That is what we are being empowered by the Spirit to do
to serve Christ in the here and now, our here and now, in our daily tasks

So let me then end with a few words about being empowered

We don't need to try this on our own as if it is all up to us
(I get words of warning emails about that pastor as lone ranger habit too)

I like that idea of being 'empowered'. I need it.

Empowerment has got a Ted Lasso vibe about it
Put up that simple sign that says "Believe"

My friend and brother in Christ Dela helped me with this part – about empowerment

He is away visiting extended family in Virginia for several weeks
Before he left town he gave me something he had written – a gift to inspire
and empower his friend and pastor. It is a series of "I am" statements
I told him I would read over it every day for encouragement

I passed out a few copies to folks who are comfortable talking in church

Asked them to pick a couple to share out loud – a combo
(especially since someone else may have picked the same one)
As they pass the microphone and share those, I ask you to hear these
in a variety of voices (Dela who wrote them, my voice, your voice)

Oh, and to think of some "I am" statements meant to empower and encourage
that you might write and read and say yourself. We'll read a few out loud
and then if you have one to add ... we can pass you the mic as well

For example, a few of you might say 'I am' blessed to be a blessing

Or "I am" open to the Spirit ... or to be rather practical and timely

"I am" willing to serve on the nominating committee

Let's pass that mic and be empowered

***Volunteers share 3 'I am' statements from Dela
Any others to share?***

I am, you are, we are empowered to serve Christ in my daily tasks