

## **Who I Am. Who You Are.**

Acts 16:9-25

The Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 9, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

I received no vision of a man from Broadlands beckoning to me and saying, "Come and help us!" I think that my deliberation over the call would have been a lot simpler if I had received one. Instead I had to consider all of my other calls from God, my present circumstances, etc. etc. in order to arrive at the conclusion that Jesus wanted me here. I received no vision and I would be willing to bet that no one at the call meeting reported having any visions.

What is comforting to me is where Paul and his entourage did not wind up. If you read the verses just prior to the First Reading from Acts you will find two statements. The Holy Spirit did not permit us to enter into Asia. The Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to enter Bithynia. It does not say how they knew that the Holy Spirit did not want them in Asia. It does not say how they knew that the Spirit of Jesus did not want them in Bithynia. All it says is that the Spirit did not want them in either of those places. The vision of the man of Macedonia told them to go there.

I take great comfort in that. I received no visions. I received no notes on my pillow or on the altar although those would have been nice. But at least with some of the Spirit's directions we are not told how He is going to tell us only that He is going to tell us.

That means, folks, that I am your preacher. I am your pastor. Even without a vision for me or a vision for you, I am your preacher. The Spirit will use nigh unto anything in order to communicate to us where He wants us in life. Since I am here at the call of the congregation which holds the Office of the Keys, then I am your preacher. That is who I am.

Now for who you are....

You are the ones whose hearts the Lord has opened. You are the ones whose hearts the Lord has opened to hear what He has to say. You are the ones whose hearts the Lord has opened because you believe what the Lord has told you.

You say that you believe that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. You say that you believe that He suffered and was buried. You say that you believe that on the third day He rose again from the dead. It is absolutely remarkable that you believe that He rose from the dead. It is absolutely remarkable that you think that the crucifixion of some Jew two thousand years ago has something to do with you and your salvation.

People will say that you are deluded. You have been fooled by your teachers at church. You have been fooled by powerful people in the church who want your money and in order to get it they have invented this wild story about a resurrection from the dead in order to give you the hope of everlasting life so that you will go to them for hope and give them your money. That is what people will say. They will say that the Church is only after your money.

I think that if I were pulling the wool over your eyes I would pick a more believable lie to tell you than that someone rose from the dead. I think I would preach more pop psychology or relevant philosophy to you so you could lead better lives or something. I think I would do that if I were only after your money.

People will say that you are foolish. No one rises from the dead. They will point to the obvious experience that none of us have ever seen anyone rise from the dead. Since it is not within the realm of

experience, it must not have happened. It is not an experiment that can be scientifically verified. Yet all of you believe it.

I have told many unbelievers that Jesus rose from the dead. It almost always catches them by surprise. They look at me with a stare. I don't know what the stare means. Does it mean that they think that I am stupid and they are trying to figure out some polite way of telling me? Does it mean that they are politically correct and they do not wish to violate a deeply held belief that I have, but they are also thinking that such a belief is simply not for them? Does it mean that they are thinking about believing it themselves? That is what I pray for.

I pray that when I tell someone that Jesus rose from the dead that they will stop and think of all the advantages of a world where people rise from the dead. I am hoping that they are thinking about a world of everlasting life. I am hoping that they are thinking about believing in Jesus and under the power of the Spirit, doing so. But I must say I really don't know what their stares mean. Perhaps they think that I am an unusual novelty and belong in a circus: the man who believes that Jesus rose from the dead.

But you don't think it is strange! You don't think it is unusual. You come in here and time after time say that you believe that on the third day Jesus rose from the dead. You believe something remarkable. You believe something that flies in the face of science and experience. You believe in something that grants a future and hope. You believe in something that the rest of the world seems hell bent on opposing. You believe in something that gets other people in other parts of the world killed. You believe something that is singularly unbelievable. Yet you believe in it anyway.

So you are the people whose hearts the Lord has opened. If you weren't you wouldn't believe in Jesus at all, much less believe that He rose from the dead.

Who are you? You are the people whose hearts the Lord has opened. That is who you are.

You are the people whose hearts are opened to hear what the apostles said.

You don't just wake up one day and say to yourself, "I am going to believe in Jesus." Life does not work that way. Someone has to tell you about Jesus in order for you to believe in Him. Faith comes by hearing, Romans says. Ephesians says that we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world when we heard the Gospel of truth, the salvation of our lives. If you are going to believe in Jesus, then you have to have heard about Him.

Someone told you that Jesus rose from the dead. Someone told you that Jesus was crucified. Someone told you that Jesus was crucified for you. Someone explained to you that the crucifixion of Jesus was a sacrifice. They explained that He sacrificed Himself. They explained to you that His sacrifice atones for your sins. They explained to you that His blood washes your sins away. They explained to you that because He died your sins are forgiven. They explained that to you. They proclaimed that to you. Jesus is for you. They proclaimed to you that He rose from the dead. You believe it.

Your hearts are not just open hearts. Your hearts are hearts that are open to what God is telling you.

Your parents tell you. Your Sunday School teachers tell you. I tell you. If you are blessed, your friends tell you. Your neighbors tell you. They tell you words. They are words about Jesus. They are words about His crucifixion. They are words about His resurrection. You believed them.

You believed them because the Lord opened your heart. You believed them because the Lord opened your heart to hear His words.

That is who you are. You are the people who listen to God. You are the people whose hearts He opened to hear His words.

You are the people who are baptized.

The risen Jesus commands baptism. He does not command you to be baptized. He commands His Church to perform Baptisms. The risen Jesus commands Baptism. Baptism is an important component in our Lord's agenda to make disciples of all nations. The risen Jesus commands Baptism. Since the risen Jesus commands it, we get it done.

If someone else had commanded Baptism, we might at some point ask ourselves, "Why are we doing this?" Or to ask it the way the catechism asks it, "How can water do such great things?" Water can't do such great things. That is the honest answer. The risen Christ, however, can do great things. He can rise from the dead. If He can rise from the dead, He can do anything. If He says that this water in His Name forgives sins, then it forgives sins. If He says it saves, then it saves. If He says it bestows the Holy Spirit, then it bestows the Holy Spirit. If He says that it covers you in His righteousness, then it covers you in His righteousness. He is the risen Christ, who am I to say that He cannot make water do whatever He wants it to do.

You believe this. You believe this so you made sure. You made sure that your children were baptized. You made sure that you were baptized. You made sure that your friends and neighbors knew about the blessings and benefits of Baptism. You reminded your children to have their children baptized. A little superstitious at times, a little *ex opera operato* sometimes, but still it means you believe Jesus or you wouldn't think that it was important at all.

You have the water on you. When the water is on you, the Name is on you. The Name is on you. It is the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That is the Name. That is the Name that is on you. That is who you are. You are a people of the Name. You are a people with the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit upon you.

You are people of water and of the blood. You are people who come from the side of Jesus. You are the people who come from His rib. You are the new creation. You are the baptized.

It may have been a while since you looked at the table of duties in the catechism. Most pastors don't teach it because they do not have the time to get to it. I am one of those pastors. But the duties are there. The duties remain. The duties do not talk about clergy and laity.

I am not a clergyman to the catechism. You are not laity to the catechism. To the Synod's constitution you may be laity. To our congregation's constitution you may be laity, but not to God. Laity implies non professional. Laity implies someone who is ignorant of the things of which the professional is expert. If we continue to use those terms it means that I am an expert on God and you are laity, ignorant of God. I think that when it comes to God an "expert" on Him is one of the dumbest things I have ever heard. In the eyes of God, I fail to see how I am any better of than you.

I am not an expert. I am a preacher. I tell you what God says. You are not laity. You are not idiots. You are hearers. You listen to what God says. And that is all. That is who you are. That is who I am.

And since I am the one saying that, then I have judged you faithful toward God. And you have invited me to remain in your house.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.