

Acts 16:9-15; John 14:23-29

It is said that "When one door closes, another opens." We say that to remind ourselves not to focus too long and with regret on the closed door that we miss the one that opens. In fact, failures and negative outcomes are still teaching moments: many scientists and entrepreneurs, who originally failed in their endeavors, learned from their mistakes only to improve and achieve new and more promising results. Failure teaches better than success.¹

Believers ascribe the closure of doors to God's will. When we try to discern God's will in prayer, we put our trust in God who knows what is good for us: God gives us what we need and not what we want. At times, our prayer is answered with a definite negation. Sometimes, with a resounding "Yes." Other times, with a "Not yet." God's timing is not our timing: God doesn't give us what we want when we want it.

Today, we have an example of that reality in Luke's second book, the Acts of Apostles. The Book presents to us the evangelizing activities of the early Church. Paul prayed long and hard to discern God's will and to find the right place to share the salvific story of Jesus. What transpires from the reading is that the Spirit of God not only inspired Paul and his companions to spread the gospel but also instructed them where *not* to go by creating roadblocks: no ministry in Asia or Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). At least, not now.

Professor Jaclyn Williams comments:

"Life in the Spirit is a wild ride. John 3:8 tells us,

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

[...] If we surrender to the movement, the Spirit's wind will pick us up and place us in positions of flourishing beyond our wildest imaginations. Sometimes the movement comes in like a whisper. Sometimes it rushes in like wildfire. Paul is Spirit-moved to geographic locations. He is also moved to spiritual locales of the heart."²

Let's keep that in mind when we plan for ministry.

Once in Troas, a *man* appeared to Paul in a vision and summoned him to Macedonia. Paul and his companions left immediately for the island of Samothrace and were lucky enough to take a "straight course." The next day they were off to Philippi via Neapolis.

¹ [What Exactly Do We Learn from Failure? | Psychology Today](#)

² Jaclyn P. Williams, [Commentary on Acts 16:9-15 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

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The urgency of the appeal in the vision and the successful crossing (the “straight course”) where there are normally unpredictable winds signified the assistance of the Spirit. The clear intimation is that God was in this, enabling Paul to arrive in record time!

Philippi was a “little Italy,” a Roman colony where veterans resettled as part of the reward for their service. I wonder if they had an annual day of national recollection like our Memorial Day, when they stopped to honor their grief for those who had fallen in battle?

In that part of Greek territory, now Roman colony, not enough Jews were around to form the necessary quorum of ten adults for a Jewish synagogue.³ So, Paul and his companions went to the river where they hoped to find a prayer meeting as it was customary. There, they found some women, including Lydia, “a worshipper of God.” The Greek term indicates she was a God-fearer, interested in Judaism, even prayerful, but not a fully observant member of the community.

Lydia listened to them. She must have been impressed by what they had to say. Luke tells us that “the Lord opened her heart,” reminding us that conversion is in the Lord’s hands, not ours. Lydia became the first recorded convert to Christianity in Europe. She was a “dealer in purple cloth,” which the wealthy purchased. Therefore, she was a woman of means. Her affluence and power were put to good use: Lydia’s house became the church in Philippi (verse 40) and she was among the first female leaders!

Paul’s and his traveling companions’ *availability* to the promptings of the Spirit allowed God to transform them first. This is personal spiritual success measured by one’s expanded sensorial capacities (vision, hearing), generosity, flexibility, openness of heart and the desire to increase others’ wellbeing by sharing the Good News.

Their availability allowed God to work on others also (Lydia and the future community of believers in Philippi). Their love for the Lord gets multiplied as Love reaches new people. In that occasion, Lydia learned of the love of God in Jesus through the generous availability of Paul. “When we open our hearts to God, God invites us to step into the greater, divine vision of life, leading us to places and people we never imagined.”⁴ In Love, we are called into creative partnership.

It’s a circle of hospitality: God hosts us in Love, in Joy and in Compassion, and, thus nurtured, we host one another, we receive and give, generously and with enthusiasm, multiplying care and enlarging community.

³ [Minyan: The Congregational Quorum | My Jewish Learning](#)

⁴ Jaclyn P. Williams, [Commentary on Acts 16:9-15 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

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Joy, hospitality and enthusiasm took hold of Lydia who opened her home to the missionaries and didn't take a "No" for an answer. Luke tells us that she prevailed upon them (Acts 16:15). It's amusing to consider how Paul, a spiritual giant of the faith, did not have credible arguments to counteract Lydia's firm insistence to host them at her house. She prevailed because her faith in the Lord was great, reminding us of Jesus' encounter with the persistent Canaanite woman who begged Jesus to come and cure her a demon possessed daughter. In that occasion, Jesus changed his mind and performed the miracle.⁵

Availability changes hearts and allows faith to grow.

May we know the Joy of being loved. May we live in the hope of a compassionate and welcoming reality. Amen.

⁵ Matthew 15:21-28