

## Intersections

### *A Sermon from Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church*

Faye Burdick, Elder

May 13, 2007

**Scripture Readings: Acts 16:9-15, Revelation 21:10, 21:22-22:5, John 14:23-29**

There was a woman who absolutely frowned upon people chewing bubble gum. And she really detested people blowing bubbles while they were talking. This same woman, who despised popping bubbles, had a history of breast cancer in her family and in the past had several biopsy-type scares. When she went to have her annual mammogram, the young woman who was the mammography technician was chewing bubble gum! The technician read the woman's history, saw the biopsy scars and was blowing bubbles. In between the popping she said, "Sometimes women who have such history choose to follow up a routine mammogram with ultrasound technology".

The mammogram came back negative. As the woman's internist reported that everything looked OK, the woman felt that everything wasn't OK. Remembering the words of the bubble-gum-chewer, she requested a sonogram. The results from that test were: the finding of a stage-three cancer, followed by radical surgery, most aggressive chemo and radiation.

A happen-stance intersection of two women: one, popping gum, the other almost missing words because of a habit of dismissing people who pop bubbles. One who offered a plan, the other who was able for just a second to put aside judgment and hear something that eventually saved her life.

Our Scripture from Acts offers a story of an intersection: that of Paul and Lydia. This story is supposedly told by Luke. Luke perhaps isn't really interested in Lydia; he wants the reader to know primarily about Paul and secondly, about the early church. But you can't tell a story about followers of Jesus without telling about intersections of lives and how those intersections afford growth, nurture, safety and challenges.

Before the intersection of Lydia and Paul, there was another intersection that came in form of a dream. It's called a vision by Luke, but we'll say that Paul was led by a dream, an inspiration, a spiritual call, or as we from Kentucky might say a hunch or a hankering. The man in Paul's dream pleaded, "Come over to Macedonia and help us".

The remarkable thing about the results of Paul acting on the intersection of himself and his vision was: Paul left Asia and traveled to Europe. This is Paul's second mission journey but his first into Europe. Paul and probably Luke departed from what is now Turkey. They set sail across the Aegean to their final destination of Philippi in Macedonia, a Roman Colony, north of Greece. On the Sabbath day, they went outside the gate by the river where they supposed there was a place of prayer.

## Intersections

Now we have to take a time out. Humor me for a minute. John Weggener, Diana Sauter, Ruth Ann Van Loon, Floy Ann Marsh, Pastor Susan, Jan Gallagher, Josh Morgan, Janis Adams and I have had the privilege to meet with thirteen people who have committed to a rather extensive New Members Class... four, two-hour classes, homework, plus next week a meeting with the Deacons and Elders and will be before you on May 27th. They are a wonderful group of people who are so gifted and haven't popped bubble gum... not once!

During our time together we've talked a lot about Scripture, being a Presbyterian and faith. Guy Humphrey, Valerie Bernardino, Elizabeth Tallmadge, and Nan Costello have attended on different Sundays to talk about their own personal faith journeys. All were different...all referred to times of intersecting with another person or persons who meant something in their faith journeys. Floy Ann Marsh shared her faith journey not with words but with action as she prepared elegant feasts each Sunday for all participants. Gordon DeViney and Brian Anderson also shared their faith journey with actions as each Sunday we entered the Geier room and were greeted with beautifully appointed tables enhanced with fresh flowers. How God's grace unfolds in our lives!

The new members shared their faith, their questions and "ahahs". For example, Ben shared that the Gospels meant more to him because the Epistles seem to be addressing an audience and time that wasn't familiar. Jean declared that she had never been fond of Paul but that at this time in her life when her career is that of an administrator of volunteers, she feels she knows more about Paul who also was working with folks who were volunteers and his ideas were new. He, like Jean, was attempting to say come on folks...this is the way. Jack expressed finding new meaning in reading The Beatitudes. Niako and Dannie produced awesome-written answers to homework. Gloria, a pro both at being a Presbyterian and a teacher of Scripture has been great support. Scott has been one of those wonderful persons who shares his faith by action, the can-do person getting the right supplies or fixing something that doesn't work. Chuck lent his spiritual discipline of hospitality in setting a tone of friendliness to all. Michele, being a working, single parent of twins, had to make a superhuman effort to be a part of our journey. Deb and Mike were the first to offer to stay late and clean up. Eric... well, what can I say being a former school teacher when he says... I love home work! Stephanie inspired me with her genuine quest for the academia of theology. It was super cool hearing these fine people share insights related to their faith.

But back to Lydia and Paul. We left Paul and friends going outside the gate of the European city to a place of Prayer by the riverside. Paul spoke to the women who had gathered there...which means he told them of Jesus. We assume that this is new info to the women...but we are told that Lydia was already a worshiper of God. This brings the question: Where did Lydia get her groove? I mean here was this woman, who not only was a business woman ....dealer of purples...big bucks... seemly independent, had a entourage of sorts, having what appears to be a women's spirituality group down by the riverside. Now there is an unlikely intersection... kind of like Donald Trump meets Oprah or bubble- gum, mammography technician meets distaining, white woman.

## Intersections

Not only did Paul baptize Lydia but her household. Listen to the verbs in the Scripture: gathered there, listened to us, opened her heart, urged us, judged me to be faithful, come and stay. These wonderful verbs show the use of human senses, discernment, acceptance, and hospitality. Wow! This intersection, this crossing of paths, resulted in a life changing events: for Paul, he had his first European convert; for Lydia, she opened her home to become a house church believing in the teachings of Jesus.

Today's lectionary reading from the apocalyptic book of Revelation enhanced my thoughts of what could happen when we put aside, sometimes just for a moment, to listen, to open, to act as a result of our intersections with other people. It may be like the New Jerusalem with her gates never shutting by day because there will be no night. Picture a river flowing with the water of life and on either side of the river is the tree of life and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations.

Crossing paths with other people... interacting... intersections: we often take them for granted. We ask "How are you" and don't hesitate one second to listen to a response. We say "Have a good day" without having a momentary vision of what a good day may entail for that person. We say "God bless you" and not even consider how we might serve as part of that blessing. At social gatherings our eyes scope the room to see who's there while some individual is talking to us. We dismiss people because of preconceived judgment: too old, too young, too pieced, too tattooed, too right, too left, ...can't stand her blue hair, can't stand his buzzed hair...considers him distant, considers her over the top!

Then there's Jesus. He had been with some of these followers for three years. He had tried by example, with parables, and using every possible manner of teaching that: Intersections result in verbs...but these followers were still just that: followers not doers, not leaders. Full of questions and fears and not a clue to Jesus' teaching to be open to the Spirit that is of God that shows itself through our intersection with the lives of others.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John has three different followers asking Jesus about: who is God, where is Jesus going, and how is it that Jesus reveals himself to them but not as a King to the world. Three years and they still don't get it: that Jesus has been teaching them that God reveals God through the Holy Spirit working through them!

And Jesus once more tells them: I've said all the things to you in person, but when I'm not here the Spirit will remind you of what I've taught. I'm giving you something that the world can't give you. Listen up, folks, pay attention, be open, rejoice, expect, and believe!

The author of the Gospel of John, writing after Jesus' death, is trying to meet needs of the early Christian community that is being persecuted. The writer offers to them the comfort of a Jesus who though not with them physically is with them as the Spirit of God is revealed to them in community...through intersecting with other people.

## Intersections

The church today is not under the same type of persecution, but we have identity issues, conflicts of interpretations, challenges regarding property ownership and who can and can't be part of leadership. Once again we can hear words of Jesus as the spirit of God works through our interactions with others. "I am still with you, Peace I leave with you, don't let your hearts be troubled, don't be afraid, rejoice, God is great". Today once again as the Spirit still works through others, hear these words: Don't get so caught up in the notion of an adult chewing gum and popping bubbles that you loose your life.

Faye Burdick  
Elder, Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church  
May 13, 2007

Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church  
103 William Howard Taft Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45219  
(513) 281-5945  
<http://www.mtauburnpresby.org>