



## **"Recalculating"**

Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"

*Acts 16:1-10*

**Mark Charbonneau**

May 29, 2011

This is a special day in the life of our community. I just want to say to the seniors, congratulations. It is no small thing to be able to graduate from high school and to do it so well. So, has a gift I wanted to provide something for you. I remember when I was your age and I was sitting there and I look much like I do now (audience laughter). When I was going off to college, I was naive and so what I'd like to do is share a little bit of a gift, a couple of things I wish I had known before I went to college. By the way, this is not something I found on line. This is something I wrote.

Sometimes in college, you will study will weeks on end. You will have an all nighter before your exam. Even though you take the exam and feel like you got an A, you will get a D. In college sometimes, you will barely study. You'll go to that party. How cares about the test? You will take the test and think you've flunked it, but you'll get an A. The next piece of advice for you in college is to graduate. My next piece of advice for you in college is don't fret about choosing a major, most people change their career fields eight times; just have fun. In college not all Jell-O is like the Jell-O your mom use to make you. Ladies sometimes in college guys will approach you to be a study party, this is just guys and they are looking for cheap dates. If a meeting is publicized with free pizza and starts at 7:00 p.m., the pizza will be gone at 6:45 pm. All clocks on campus will show a different time. A new form of currency in college is called cotton, these are t-shirts that are given for different for crush parties, date parties or social gatherings; not only are they medals of social standing, but they are also helpful in delaying to do laundry – which leads me to the next piece of advice. It is possible, not advised to wait until the break to take your sheets from your bed and bedcover home for its annual or bi-annual wash. The last piece of advice I will give you, has to do with your parents – after having to do things for yourself for the very first time, it is amazing how smart you parents become in the four years of college, thank them. That is my gift to you.

Well, today we are going to go on a couple of trips together. I'd like to have this sermon be an opportunity for us to take a trip, you know because it is summer time, the time that people take trips, especially this weekend – school just got out, it is Memorial day weekend and here we are. What are you doing here? It is a three-day weekend and you are supposed to be out having fun. I mean, I don't think anyone really expected you to be here. I mean Peter Barnes isn't even here. They didn't expect you to be here and that is why they allowed me to preach (audience laughter). But, here you are, the devote, the remnant – you are either here because you didn't have a trip planned or just that you are the guilt stricken Presbyterian where you just need to be in church on Sunday. Regardless, I'd like to have this morning be an opportunity for us to take a trip so to speak. All road trips should come with a play list of music, so I have some music along for us on this journey together. So, that being the case, I'd like us to take a trip.

Our first trip I'd like to head to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. Now, I know who likes to go New Jersey on vacation? But, I'd still like for us to go there. We are going there to actually visit a military base, which is

fitting this Memorial weekend. This military base is something unique. It is not like a typical military base, it actually has a museum on this base to say thank you to the different veterans that have come and go. These military heroes were known for their courageous feats during World War II, but they are feats of navigation.

One particular hero I'd like to focus on was born in 1918. He was twenty years old when he had his great feat of victory. He was wounded and blinded in one eye carrying a very important message and I'd like for you to meet G. I. Joe, he is a homing pigeon and on this military base they pay tributes to the different birds that have helped the military during the many years.

Right now [on the screen] you are looking at a bona fide war hero. During the WWII, the English military was joining the fight with the American military and they were going against the Nazi hold in Italy. So they had choreographed this attack where the English army was going to push the Nazis back. The Nazis had a stronghold in this town called Cola Vatchia. As they were pushing back the Germans, there was a plan for the Americans to come behind them and to bomb the Germans as they were fleeing. But the problem was that as the English were beginning to push them back, they were more victorious than they were expecting and so they were able to actually push them back way ahead of schedule and they actually took that small town that they were expecting the Germans to have a stronghold of. So they got there and within 20 minutes they looked at their watch and said to themselves that the Americans are about to bomb this town that we are now in. All the communications were out; the only thing they had at their disposal was a bird. So, they had wrote this note on GI Joe and put it in the little tube attached to the bird. Their lives depending on this small bird to travel twenty miles to go back to this military base to share the message not to bomb this town.

Imagine holding on to this pigeon and your life depending on it and you released the bird. Through smoke and battlefields and the different things that would come along. The bird had to make his way twenty miles to a military base. Now mind you he has never been to Cola Vatchia and so he is navigating a place he has never been to. He has just been in this box waiting for an opportunity to return home. With some sort of instinctual ability he navigates from unknown places back to his home and when he arrives the Americans were loading up their planes about to go on this run that would end up killing over 1,000 British soldiers and this small bird, GI Joe, saved their lives. He was later awarded a medal of honor for his patriotic mission.

Not only is this amazing to me, because this bird was able to save all these lives, but how does he do it? How do these birds have this ability to navigate ways that we don't understand? Now the scientific community has tried to understand this. They've done so many studies. They've put homing pigeons with metal blocks on their backs. They've taken out their olfactory system so they can't smell where they are going and where they've been. They knocked them out and just released them in some random place to see if even being unconscious if they could still navigate home. They've put frosted contacts on their eyes so that their vision is blurred. They've put metal helmets on their heads to stop the magnetizing effect that they were expecting from the beaks. The scientific community has come up with one explanation of how they are able to navigate – have no clue - they just do it. There is something within them or outside of them that gives this ability for them to always navigate home. What a powerful mystery that is, that God has created this animal to be able to always go home.

Let's take a second trip. This trip is not into a destination, but it is also back in time. We are going to look at Acts, Chapter 16 with this framework of navigation and being able to go on a journey and how people are able to navigate in many ways.

To understand Acts 16 we have to look back at Acts 15, even though you were all here last week, because you are the devote Presbyterians who go to church every Sunday, I'd still like to reflect on it. Last week there is a little bit of an issue that the church was coming to. For us to understand it we have to understand that when the Christian faith came to be it was not seen as something other than the Jewish faith. It was a completed Jewish faith. The original converts were Jewish people who saw Jesus as the Messiah; it was the completion of their faith. Then after a while these Gentiles started to come to faith in Christ and it left this Jewish community to kind of go, "What do we do with this? How Jewish does a Christian need to be?" Which for them was unique question. With all the different rules and orders of life, how many of those Gentile converts need to have.

A council got together in Acts 15 and they wrote a letter. The synopsis of this letter says this:

**<sup>28</sup> It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: <sup>29</sup> You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.**

**Farewell.**

Sounds like a conversation my dad and I have over the phone, straight and to the point.

Now, what is the important thing about this is not what was mentioned, but was not mentioned – namely circumcision. There is a lot of belief that to be considered a Christian that a Gentile would have to go through circumcision. So, Paul was given the task to take this letter and to actually go and share this Good News to the different Gentiles. We find ourselves here in Acts 16, let us read. (Reads Acts 16-13.)

**Timothy Joins Paul and Silas**

**<sup>1</sup> He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. <sup>2</sup> The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.**

Well what? I thought this letter was so that they wouldn't have to be circumcised. Right, isn't this kind of counter intuitive? So, Paul is going on a trip to share that circumcision wasn't necessary and he meets Timothy and what's the first thing he does? Circumcision. Doesn't quite make sense. For us we have to understand, take a little step deeper into who Timothy is. We have a couple of different insights of who Timothy was. We know very few things, but some of the things that we know about him the most are from Paul's letters to Timothy. Who was this man?

We know that Timothy was young. The very verse shared earlier, 1Timoty 4:12,

**<sup>12</sup> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.**

I think that is a great verse, especially for you graduating seniors. As you are leaving, in many ways this is a rite of passage that you are men and women of God. So, don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. By the ways, some of the greatest Christian movements that have happened over the last several generations were birthed from college students. You guys really can change the world and God

has plans and purposes. So, don't look down upon yourself and don't allow others to look down upon you. God has great intentions for you now, not just one day.

We know that Timothy was young. What else do we know about him? He lived in Lystra and Iconium. We know that first time Paul went there in Acts 14, he and Barnabas were thought of as gods. Right? Remember this passage where they showed up and they thought they were gods and then five verses later they stoned them. Very fickle people there in Iconium.

Through that encounter where he met Timothy's grandmother and mother, 2Timothy 1:5 says:

**<sup>5</sup> I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.**

This is just a beautiful snapshot of the importance in the ministry that grandparents and parents can have in children. Never underestimate the far reaching consequence of raising one small child to love the Lord and to serve Him and for each of you to treat your own child as a Timothy.

We also know in this passage that Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was Greek. In this culture, your heritage was based on your mother's background, which gives us a lot of insight perhaps of why Timothy was circumcised. So, if Timothy's mother is Jewish that means that Timothy would be considered a Jewish boy.

This letter is being sent to the Gentile community that they did not need to be circumcised. Yet, it didn't go as far as to say that the Jewish community didn't need to be circumcised. So, Timothy went through the painful process so that he could be a part of God's ministry. Almost like a readying of ministry, that to be a part of God's work sometimes calls for sacrifices that don't quite make sense for us. But, Paul was willing to do whatever it would take to share the Gospel. We find in 1 Corinthians 9 his statement about this:

**For the Jew I became Jew. For the weak, I became weak so that I might share the Gospel.**

He shared this message with Timothy and that painful process of being able to share the Gospel for those who are weak. It is interesting in this passage, who are the weak ones? Who is the religious community? Sometimes a religious community put burdens on others that seem difficult to handle and our religiousness might become a weakness, yet he was willing for Timothy to go through that so that he could be a part of the proclamation of the Gospel.

I love the fact that this was how Timothy was disciple and raised by Paul inviting him to come along with me. That is how discipleship happens, when people say, "I want to invite you to come along with me." Our church's mission statement says this: That we exist to invite people into God's larger story as we follow Christ together. In many ways, that is how we might share Christ with others. This is not by sharing a four point system, a methodology, but it more about saying, "I just want to invite you to come along with me to experience what I'm experiencing." That brings about authenticity for us. Do we consider ourselves on a journey with Christ? If so, it becomes a lot easier to invite people to join with us. I hope we are that invitational church.

If we go onto Acts 16:4-5 we see the ramifications of this journey that Paul took with Timothy as they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the Apostles and the Elders in

Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened and the faithful grew daily in numbers and that this letter that they shared strengthened the church and allowed it to grow.

After this there is a kind of a weird turn, after they shared this message with different churches there, then Paul senses this urging to do something different. For whatever reason, he senses this urging to take the Gospel where it had not been before. Like an unknown forest, he began to see the Holy Spirit directing them out. In Acts 16:

### ***Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia***

**<sup>6</sup> Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup>**

We find in this that he tries to go into Asia two different times, yet the Holy Spirit refuses it. It holds him back. In many ways it is like these birds, there is some unknown movable force that exist outside them that is helping them navigate and we find in this that it is the Spirit of Jesus that is compelling them, it is moving them, it is directing them.

We actually have within our own lives forces that helps us and directs us as well. These are the different things that direct us [playing "recalculating" female voice from audible GPS]. That is my least favorite sound in the entire world, recalculating. When you think you are going one direction and all of a sudden this voice from within your car somewhere out there is telling you that you are on the wrong path and many times as I'm driving I think I'm going the right direction and I'll hear this voice and it just lets me know that I'm a little bit off. So it kind of moves us, it redirects us.

We find this with Paul, that he felt compelled by the Spirit of Christ to go and share the Gospel where it hadn't been yet before. Then all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit held him back. For me this is a great example of someone who really felt a mission to be sent out by God and he was just busy at work and so he wasn't asking God to call him here or here – he was just busy at work for Christ. For us I think, many of us might struggle with over spiritualizing where and how to serve. Many of us are unsure and say to ourselves, I don't know if God is calling me to serve here or here? I don't know if he wants me to do this or that? We might have this, as I've heard – paralysis of analysis. Where we just have so many different options and we just really don't know where God might call us to serve. Meanwhile, God might be saying to us to just do something.

There is a lot of freedom in his kingdom. We know the Spirit of Jesus if we walk with Him and follow Him, there is a lot of freedom in that. Yet, Paul on the other hand is yet attentive to the fact that God might say, "No, I know it makes complete sense for you to take the Gospel into Asia and to go to new parts of Asia that haven't heard the Gospel yet, but I have another plan for you."

Notice what Paul does. He just stops. God doesn't give him the end plan. He says, "No, you're not going to Asia right now." God doesn't give Paul the whole picture. Sounds like my life, where many ways God just gives me the next step. For Paul the next step was to stop and to wait. While he was waiting he has this vision of a man in Macedonia in a dream just saying the simple words, "Help us."

Why was this such a big deal? This would be the first time that the Gospel would go into Europe. Never had the Gospel message been taken into Europe and the simple dream where a man saying, "Please, help us." Paul immediately looks at that and he says, "God has called us to preach the Gospel to them."

My job at this church is Director of Local Missions and I get to see our church in amazing ways, the different ways that we help people in this city and around this area. Even this next week with IHN, I have a privilege point of view to see how our church helps people in so many ways. We do so many great things. One of the things that I hope that we consider as we hear the message from people to help us is that we also go beyond the physical needs and we see the spiritual needs. That seems to be what Paul first thought of. It wasn't how can I help them with benevolence, or how can I help them with justice or mercy. It was a spiritual help that they needed.

Sociologists have studied something that I find fascinating. When you encounter someone who has a call for help, a plea for help, there are two different reactions within each of us. There is the action for us to come to them, to help them. Then there is also the instinctual desire to flee, to get out of there. We've all experienced that when someone has a plea for help there are these two different battles within us. To help and to take care of ourselves.

What the sociologists have found is that the thing that will dictate whether you come to their aid or not, is not your strength, it is not your aptitude, it is not some courage, it is not the fact that you've been raised a certain way or not. The thing that is the most powerful to dictate whether or not you will help someone is a mental script. We know this. When you see someone who is in need, you have all these different messages come to your mind. What would I want if I were that person? I don't know what is going on; maybe it is none of my business? Maybe that person desires to be in the spot they are in? What would I want if that was my mother, my brother or sister in need? What ends up happening is whatever mental script you agree with will dictate how you respond. That is the most powerful thing in the moment of responding, is known which script you agree with. If that is the case with physical needs, physical help, what if it was the case with the spiritual need?

What is our mental script for people who do not know Christ? We see them and we see a spiritual need, a cry for help. What is your mental script of them in your response. It is none of my business, I don't want to speak into anything. I don't want to be pushy with my faith. Maybe our mental script is maybe I'll just help from a distance, but I don't want to actually speak the name Jesus.

I'm only very hesitant in saying what your script should be? I think that is something we all need to wrestle with. We first need to acknowledge that we do have a mental script when we think of those we see in need who do not know of Christ. What is our script? What would compel us to action or inaction? I'm curious about Paul's mental script? What compelled him? Luckily, we have a little bit of insight of what compelled Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15...

**<sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. <sup>5</sup>**

What was that invisible force that compelled Paul into action? What was that unseeable force that struck him blind and then changed him from the inside out? What was unseen force that moved him to go into places where he was stoned and to come back again and again or to take the Gospel where it had never been before? That unmovable force, that mental script was the very powerful reality that Christ's love compels us. We can't be people of activity, of sharing the Gospel, if we've lost sight of His powerful deep love of you and me. It is only on that foundation that we can do any good for the Gospel – out of just the grateful heart that says, "Thank you for loving me." I think the more that we tie into that, the more that

Christ's love will compel us, because we see love is not for me, but it is for us and I long to share that love with others.

I'd like to finish with going back to the story about birds because we can't finish too heavy, we have to finish light.

Something else that is interesting about birds, about these pigeons, something unique to them – they are monogamous. Most birds are not monogamous beings. You put a bunch of birds together it is just hedonistic; all the keys go into a bowl and who cares about commitment. It just only the present moment. Not so with pigeons, they are devoted, they are committed. They have one mate for life, which for me is kind of an interesting idea. They have one mate for life and this compelling drive to go home.

You ever want to see a pigeon fly faster than ever before, you take a pigeon out of his cage and you take the male and female pigeon and in their place you put another pigeon in its place and you allow that pigeon to look into that cage [plays song with lyrics, "Love hurts..."] the feathers ruffle, it coos and that vision of someone else being in the cage with their mate, with their partner for life, you take them miles away and they will return back to the cage faster than ever before. It is something that scientists have studied and it is called the Widowing Method. That is how these birds will return home faster than ever. It is an interesting idea.

Do they return home or do they return to the one that their life has been connected with? What is this innate ability for them to always be able to navigate back home. Perhaps it is not the destination, but it is a being, a thing, a person and for us maybe we begin there as to how we navigate. It is so much about a destination as it is this reality that Christ has created us to know Him, to be with Him and our hearts might not ever fill at piece until we find our home in Him.

Let us pray.

*Spirit of Jesus, we pray that You would fill us. It is a very simple prayer, Christ. I just pray that Your love would fill us. More than any other prayer that we be sent out, that we do good work, my prayer for us is that we would know and experience the deep richest of Your love for us and that out of Your love that You would send us in this world to serve You and to love You as you long for us. We thank You for this message and the reality that we are created to know You. We pray this in Your name. Amen.*