



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-20-2015 @ 0900

"When God's Spirit Guides, 'Guessing Games' are Gone!"

Acts 16:1-12

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THAT NAME

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! There's just something about that Name!

Master! Savior! Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain!

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus, let all heaven and earth proclaim:

"Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there's something about that Name!"

Acts 16:1-12

"Paul traveled on to Derbe and Lystra, where a Christian named Timothy lived. His mother, who was also a Christian, was Jewish, but his father was a Greek. All the believers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of Timothy. Paul wanted to take Timothy along with him....They traveled through the region of Phrygia and Galatia because the Holy Spirit did not let them preach the Message in the province of Asia.So they traveled right on through Mysia and went to Troas. That night Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian stranding and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us!' As soon as Paul had this vision, we got ready to leave for Macedonia, because we decided that God had called us to preach the Good News to the people there."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Did you ever "flip a coin", or use "rock, paper, scissors", or do "eeny, meeny, miny, mo" to decide among options, or pick a direction? How helpful were those "guides"?
- Have you ever found yourself "overwhelmed by options" in which several fine choices tugged at you? How did you finally pick one to pursue? What mentors or guides did you consult?
- Were you ever "frozen into immobility" by fear of making the wrong decision? What kind of "guidance" broke you out of that "icy grip"? How did that "choice" change you, and your life?

Life is choices, and the choices we make "make us"! Sometimes those choices are clear, and we can stride a "life path" with confidence. On other occasions, conflicting offers or layers of loyalty can "muddy the waters". If the "way ahead" signals an unexpected "detour", or is shrouded in "mist" of doubt, or blanketed by "fog" of fear, our lack of clarity may leave us feeling "lost", and "adrift" in a "sea of uncertainty". Decisions we face in the course of life can have major consequences, (e.g., drop out of school or graduate, go to VOTEC or prepare for college, seek a civilian career or join a military service, minister to local neighbors or work in a foreign mission, etc.) It's natural to experience some genuine confusion at "life's crossroads" or "forks in the path". Dr. Luke offers a "spiritual prescription" for such a condition: "Wait on direction from the Spirit of God!" In this passage, he affirms that the Holy Spirit doesn't just inspire us to "go", but will also tell us when "not to go". God's Spirit will set new priorities and parameters of ministry, sometimes in ways we least expect. Our "Holy Guide" will give us Word to speak, spur us to share when it is time to speak, and send us to those who most need our Message at the "moment of maximum opportunity"...if we will "go quiet" long enough to listen to Him. This "choice", (to "listen to the Spirit" or not,) is probably the most crucial one we face. He's always with us, every step of the way, every moment of every day, eager to "guide the obedient" into the "best of all possible options". Sometimes the Spirit will "restrain" us, or ask us to "wait", or even "go elsewhere", so that we are available for more important ministry. God, grant us the Grace of Divine Discernment. Gift us with a "Sacred Sensitivity" to Your Spirit of Truth, so we obey willingly and quickly when "redirection" becomes necessary. When "baffling instructions" arrive, or "new orders" come from on high, help us recognize their Origin and Authenticity, then carry them out with alacrity and a sense of adventure. Direct us with Your Spirit, Lord; then help us listen well!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-21-2015 @ 0900

"When God Opens a Door, Make the Most of the Invitation!"

Acts 16:1-12

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THAT NAME

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! There's just something about that Name!

Master! Savior! Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain!

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus, let all heaven and earth proclaim:

"Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there's something about that Name!"

Acts 16:12-15

"We spent several days [in Philippi]...On the Sabbath, we went out of the city to the riverside...where the Jews gathered for prayer. We sat down and talked to the women who gathered there. One of those who heard us was Lydia, from Thyatira...a dealer in purple cloth. She...worshipped God, and the Lord opened her mind...to what Paul was saying. After she and the people of her household had been baptized, she invited us, 'Come and stay at my house if you have decided I am a true believer in the Lord!' And she persuaded us to go."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- On your "journey through life", can you remember some "key moments" in which "doors of opportunity" opened? As you "entered", did you detect "God at work"?
- Were you ever "surprised by Grace", to find God had "opened hearts" to accept a "proposal" you never guessed they'd even consider, let alone accept enthusiastically?
- When "friends of God" offered you some hospitality or other "favor", were you reluctant to accept their kindness? If you finally did so, what "tipped the balance"?

Life offers opportunities, but we must *decide* to accept them! Even though "opportunity" is often cleverly disguised in unlikely times and places, we can "make the most of them" if we are open to the "surprising work" of God's Grace. Philippi in Macedonia was not Paul's "first choice" of a mission field when he and his companions set out from Antioch. Nevertheless, when the Spirit of the Lord led them to the riverbanks of that city, they offered the Gospel, and God took care of the rest. Not only did they win some hungry hearts to the Good News, but the Lord saw to their accommodations as well! While it is important to "give for free" the Gospel we have "received for free", there is also a place and time to exercise "ministry of acceptance", and allow "brothers and sisters" in the "Household of God" to share their goods and services with us as well. It's a balancing act, because Luke will note elsewhere a proverb of the Lord: "It is more blessed to give than to receive", so generous offer of our own gifts must always be our first instinct. Having said that, it's fascinating to note that Lydia "persuaded" Paul and company to accept her hospitality. (It may be that the prospect of "a friendly place to stay" was something of a novelty in the course of a mission that involved some rough treatment already, and was likely to get more challenging as they moved further into Greek territory.) As "strangers in a strange land", we who believe in God will find "friends" and "allies" where we may least expect, and must be ready to trust the Lord, giving these "new acquaintances" a "stake in the Mission" when the Lord moves their hearts to do so. Our smiles and helpful hands may open doors we never imagined, and we need to be ready to celebrate the friendship such encounters may awaken. God, grant us the Grace of Ready Recognition! When we have offered Your Good News in good faith, and "strangers" respond with authentic generosity, inspire us to recognize Your Grace and Providence. With grateful hearts and open minds, may we respond to genuine concern, and be good stewards of the favors we receive! Let such blessings bring joy to both givers and receivers, as we recognize Your Spirit of Love at work in the "two-way sharing" we engage to the Glory of Your Name!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-22-2015 @ 0900

"Praise Isn't Always a Good Thing"

Acts 16:16-18

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THAT NAME

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! There's just something about that Name!

Master! Savior! Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain!

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus, let all heaven and earth proclaim:

"Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there's something about that Name!"

Acts 16:16-18

"One day as we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a young servant woman who had an evil spirit that enabled her to predict the future. She earned a lot of money for her owners by telling fortunes. She followed Paul and us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God! They announce to you how you can be saved!' She did this for many days, until Paul became so upset that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the Name of Jesus Christ, I order you to come out of her!' The spirit went out of her that very moment."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Did you ever have people "pat you on the back", saying "Good job!", "Well done!", or a comment like it, and something in their tone or aspect left you feeling unsettled and suspicious?
- Did you ever have to go back out on the playing field to congratulate the other team, when that was the last thing you wanted to do?
- How often do you find yourself using "the Name of Jesus Christ" to "draw the line" between "truth" and "error", "good" and "evil", or "friend" and "foe"?

On the surface, today's passage can appear quite confusing to the casual reader, because nothing this young woman says is false. Paul and Silas *are* servants of the Most High God, and they really *are* announcing to the people how they can be saved. So what's the problem? As a "fortune teller" of some repute, she could also be seen as a "prophet" who has a "word from the Lord", all the while creating a distraction from the "true Word" of the Lord. She is using "true" statements in a distractive and disruptive way to hinder the very Message they are offering. The secular world can still do such disruptive "advertising" and deceptive "marketing" today. We live in a press-driven society that pumps out "urgent" messages and "frantic" appeals today at an incredible and alarming rate. And when these media suddenly appear to be our "friends", and want to "sing our praises", there is usually something in it for them. (How good does it make you feel when someone sings your praise? Oh, we may feel "a little uncomfortable" at all the "fuss", but at the same time, the affirmation of such "positive strokes" can feel very good; usually we can't wait to tell somebody else what "good reviews" we got. This "appeal to vanity" is a very old ploy, often used by an enemy to take an opponent off guard, (and in the spiritual world, we need to be "on guard" at all times! Remember Satan used the very "words of Scripture" in his temptation of Christ; so he can [and will] attempt the same strategy with us. Words of praise can be very soothing for the soul, and stroke our hungry egos, but will function as "spiritual termites" that infest and destroy our spiritual foundation.) God, grant us the Grace of Disciplined Discernment. Help us stay "prayed up", so we recognize "traps of the enemy" for what they are: lies and clever distractions from the "true Way" saints have set forth since the days of Paul and Silas. In the Holy Name of Jesus Christ, keep us humble and trustworthy "servants of Your Word"!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

01-23-2015 @ 0900

"No Good Deed Shall Go Unpunished!"

Acts 16:16-24

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THAT NAME

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! There's just something about that Name!

Master! Savior! Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain!

Jesus! Jesus! Jesus, let all heaven and earth proclaim:

"Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there's something about that Name!"

Acts 16:16-24

"...a young servant woman who had an evil spirit that enabled her to predict the future. ... She followed Paul and us, shouting, ...until Paul became so upset that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the Name of Jesus Christ, I order you to come out of her!' The spirit went out of her that very moment. When her owners realized that their chance of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas... They brought them before the Roman officials and said, 'These men are Jews, and they are causing trouble in our city. They are teaching customs that are against our law!' ... the crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas. Then the officials tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be whipped. After a severe beating, they were thrown into jail, and the jailer was ordered to lock them up tight. Upon receiving this order, the jailer threw them into the inner cell, and fastened their feet between heavy blocks of wood."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Has it ever seemed to you that the more you try to "live right", "speak right", and "do right", the more things appear to move from "go together" to "come apart" in your life?
- Have you ever sensed that if you really took your Christian walk more seriously, (such as "stepping up" at Church, or "witnessing more",) you'd only get more trouble & problems in life?
- Have you known people around you who decided to "get radical" about their "commitment to the Lord", and "live the Gospel Life", only to face bitter ridicule and painful persecution?

During the 1990's, in the midst of the Haitian conflict, U.S. soldiers were struck by the abject poverty and hunger of the many Haitian children. These children were often seen digging through trash heaps in search of food. The soldiers were so moved, they were soon sharing their Meals Ready to Eat (MRE's) with the children. Word spread, and there were soon crowds of children coming for the MRE's. Then came the order: "Stop giving out these MRE's, or face disciplinary action." In such times, "Christ-like action" and "neighborly care" draw harsh criticism and bitter resistance. Then we face a challenge: "Will we 'do what is right' and face the consequences, or 'stop as directed' and be safe and comfortable?" Being a "child of God" doesn't mean we are spared difficult decisions, nor does it mean that "doing good" will never have negative consequences. The Book of Acts introduces us to a variety of Christian possibilities (some of them quite painful,) if we choose to walk in the Power of the Holy Spirit and Light of Jesus Christ. Darkness fears that Light, and hates it with a vengeance. When we STAND in the Power of the Light, we will become "primary targets" for the darkness. God, grant us the Grace of Steadfast Witness! Like Paul and Silas, we may have to "suffer for the sake of mercy" if we insist on liberating those bound in darkness. In those moments, stand with us! By Your Word, and in Your Name, we commit ourselves to an "all-in" discipleship, regardless of its dangers. We trust You and Your Son to sustain the truth of our witness in the Power of the Spirit of Light!