



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Date **9th May 2010**

Sermon **Rev Dr André Groenewald**

Reading **Acts 16:6-15**

The text verses for the sermon come from verses 9 & 10:

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Every one of us has a story. In fact every one of us is writing our life stories every second of every day. We are indeed filling our lives with stories and pictures as we go along on life's journey.

I cannot believe today is my 41st birthday and that I am standing here on a pulpit in Scotland. I never in my life imagined that I would be immigrating so late in my life with my family. I did not imagine that my life story would take such an incredible turn. I did not know what lay ahead of us when we decided to move to Scotland in 2007. We said "we will go once we get a visa that allows us to work in the Church of Scotland". Within 4 days we got the visa and we knew there was no turning back. We did not know where we would end up or how everything would go once we arrived in Edinburgh. And the rollercoaster ride began...

But faithfully, the Lord is the editor of all life stories and He had everything planned for the better. Even when the nomination

committee of Kirknewton and East Calder asked me to preach as sole nominee, I could hear his voice - telling me to trust him. And then when you as a congregation called me as your minister I again prayerfully trusted the Almighty God. And here I am now, as happy as I ever can be.

In our reading this morning Paul had a similar experience. He did not plan to go to Macedonia. Macedonia was the place which bordered the path to the unknown Eastern territories. But he received a vision telling him to go to Macedonia. Faithfully he obeyed and went to Macedonia. There he went to the renowned city Philippi which was known for its connection with Rome and its founder, Phillip, the father of Alexander the Great. Paul, the converted Christian usually went to the Jewish synagogues to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He and his fellow travellers therefore went on the Sabbath to the Jewish place of worship.

In those days the Judaist laws required the presence of 10 Jewish men to constitute a regular synagogue. In cases where there were not 10 Jewish men present, Jewish people preferred to meet in a ritually pure place near water, usually outside of cities. Ritual washing of hands before prayer seems to have been standard in Judaism. So Paul and his companions knew that there was no formal synagogue building in Philippi and went outside the city to the river. The river would have been the Gangites, one and a quarter miles from Philippi.

On their arrival they met up with several Gentile women who converted to Judaism. When Paul started to teach them the Gospel of God's salvation to all people through Jesus Christ, one woman in particular was touched. Her name was Lydia from Thyatira. She was a dealer in purple cloth. Thyatira was renowned in the ancient world for its dyers guilds and textiles. She was a rich woman for she had her own house and household full of servants and slaves. She probably made a

fortune selling purple clothes to the rich, and royalty since purple goods were expensive and often associated with royalty. Her heart was opened to the Gospel and she and the members of her household were baptised. She insisted that Paul and his companions stay with her – despite of the strong taboos against “Jews” accepting hospitality from Gentiles and staying alone with a single woman as well! Paul was willing to practise what he preached: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’.

The congregation in Philippi became a beacon of hope for Paul’s ministry all over the world. They supported him to the end financially and spiritually!

If Paul did not obey the editor of his life story there would not have been someone like Lydia opening her heart to the Gospel. If Lydia’s life story did not change, most probably Paul would not have enjoyed the support of the Philippian church! Both of them had much in common. Paul was a Jew who converted to Christianity and Lydia most probably a Gentile who converted to Judaism and then to Christianity. Both of them made a choice to follow Jesus and both put deeds to their faith. Both of them were so touched by the message of Jesus Christ that they passed it on to others.

What is your life story? Is God the editor of your life story?

If He is the editor of your life story your life will be different from others. You will always have his presence at your side. He will be with as you go through the darkest valleys of death and despair. He will be there when you struggle to tell your children right from wrong. He will be there when you are so sad that you cannot utter one word. He will be there when no one else is. He will walk each and every mile with you.

But then you must trust him, even if he tells you to go to Macedonia. The proverbial place you do not want to go to! If it is a situation that is dragging you down, go out of the church and try to sort it. If it is a person that you haven’t spoken to in a

while, go out of the church and make contact again. If it is a sickness or depression that makes your life hard, go out of here and get help.

Sometimes we write our stories in pencil – almost too afraid to do anything so that we can delete it again, or a permanent ink pen where we take life as an adventure trusting God! Which one do you use?

May our life stories be a reflection of hymn 59:

“This is my story this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long...”

Amen