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**Series: Paul's Second Missionary Journey**  
**Sermon: Fork in the Road**

**Acts 16:6-10** (NIV)

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. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 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.

**Sermon**

Our Post-Easter series is all about Paul's Second Missionary Journey. He had one already, and after a while, he decided it was time to go check out all of the places they had visited and planted new churches, so Paul and Silas go off. Last week, we see the pair pick up another disciple who would help them in their work, Timothy. And today's story takes place right after Tim joined the team. So far on their map, they left Jerusalem and headed north. They go up through Damascus...Antioch...around to Tarsus...then to Derbe and Lystra. Then something happens that Paul and the others did not expect. God takes them somewhere else. Not on the path they hoped to go. Maybe Paul remembered a line from Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD."

This is what I learn in this story - and I don't want to learn it, because it goes against our family's culture: Our agenda must always be flexible and submit to God's agenda. Not my plans, Lord, but yours. How flexible are you? It is perfectly fine to make plans and to seek to carry them out. We must plan ahead and take certain steps necessary to get to our goal. Today, at this very moment, my nephew is graduating from the college that Steph and met and graduated from back in the mid 90's. After I graduated, I wanted to take a week off from work and take a little trip to celebrate. Didn't want to go by myself, and two college friends volunteered to go. Off to New Orleans. We planned it out on the back of a paper plate with a ball point pen. Not one of us had a vehicle that could probably make the trip, and it was time for me to get a different car anyway, one that could me to seminary in the fall. Day before the trip, I got me a hoopti, a little Honda Civic, '84. Stickshift. I showed the two gals who were going the vehicle - and they both said, "We don't know how to drive a stick." Looks like I'm driving to New Orleans. Its only \$1,100 miles down there. No biggie. The morning we were to leave, New Orleans was flooded. Interstates were closed. Place shut down. But we had it planned on the paper plate! Where do you want to go? We kicked around a few places, and 5 minutes later we were on our way to San Antonio. It's a little closer. 900 miles. In Oklahoma, I thought I'd teach Sonya how to drive a stick shift. On the Interstate. Hardly anyone on the interstate - it's Oklahoma. I'm the back, Sonya and her friend in the front. And I'm coaching her through. We get in the middle of Oklahoma City - Interstate mind you - and from an on ramp comes a stationwagon careening out of control. Slices in front of us, wacks the gaurdail. Sonya freaks a little. Hit the clutch hit the clutch! Slow down. The car in front bounces off the guardrail, does a 360 and wacks the opposite guardrail. And stays with it's hood all teepeed up. Our car stops about 20 yards away, no other traffic. I jump out of the car to go see what I thought would be a dead person. Turns out, it's a 65 year old lady. Barefoot. Drunk. High on something. I smell gasoline, and she's awake - and trying to start the car again, and sparks are flying out of the engine. Did I mention the gasoline? I take her keys and wait for the paramedics. No idea what eventually happened to her. But the real story is what was going on my car. Sonya and her friend are watching this, and the friend says something like, "Ya know, I kinda like that guy." Sonya's

friend's name was Stephanie. And a week later we were dating. Not to mention that I tried to get her to date me all through college, but here we are. And I partly credit a flooded out New Orleans and a barefoot drunk driver in Oklahoma City. You never know where the Lord is going to direct your paths.

Are you flexible to submit your will to God's will or the circumstance that comes your way? Today's lesson is simply this: Our agenda must always be flexible and submit to God's agenda. Paul and the gang went through the region of northern Galatia... Phrygia and Galatia. They were there ready to preach and teach those in that region but the Holy Spirit said no. I hope you find this odd. Why would the Holy Spirit say no to missionaries strengthening the churches? Or how it made it known. Was it flood or storm? Roads in disrepair? We do not know. Luke doesn't say why. Sometimes we wonder why at certain things or events that take place in our lives. I'm sure Paul and his team wondered at this. Luke doesn't tell us what God did so that they knew they were not to speak to those in that region. Maybe the new churches weren't ready for them to come back yet. Sometimes new believers need a time of struggle. Sometimes, we can answer questions and counsel before God has had time to work in their lives. Often in counseling sessions I pray that I would not be working against God by showing the counselees any answers too quickly. Sometimes I do this as a parent - oh, just let me do it - and I deny them the privilege of learning a new skill. Sometimes God has work to do and most often He does His best work as they struggle and discover answers themselves. As parents, this is very difficult. There are times when children need to be miserable and struggle especially over the consequences of sin. If we bail them out every time they will not learn true repentance. When God works in someone's heart over their sin, they walk away with the attitude, I'm never doing that again. For whatever reason, only God knows, they were not permitted to speak the word in that region. They were prevented from speaking.

Notice, next Luke reports that they were prevented from going. Again, Luke does not tell us why or what the Holy Spirit did to prevent them from entering... they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. The term Spirit of Jesus is synonymous with the Holy Spirit. Most scholars believe this title is used to show that the Holy Spirit was working in cooperation with Jesus Christ, accomplishing His goals in the Great Commission and the expansion of the Gospel. It is vital for us to not get caught up in the why and how so much and to trust that what God was doing here was perfect and absolute sovereignty in action. For whatever reason God did not want them to go to Bithynia.

In case you're curious, it was in his third missionary trip Paul would go to these regions and would plant churches but for now it was not the time. Sometimes the answer is not yet.

So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. Troas was a coastal port city. It was noted for being the port where one would set sail for Greece, Macedonia, Philippi etc. Or back home to Israel. They traveled south west to Troas. I wonder what they were thinking at that point? I wonder if they felt a little like the Hebrews when they came to the Red Sea and wondered what was next? Or maybe did God want us to go back home? Did we misunderstand the entire campaign? Then, that night something happens that they did not expect... And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately they sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

God is leading His missionaries in strange ways. He prevents them sharing the message, He prevents them from going, He leads them to Troas, and then takes them across the sea. Just as Moses led the Hebrews across the red sea in the Exodus so now the Gospel would also cross the sea and enter into a new land. The Great Commission is a command of Gospel expansion. Go where you haven't gone before. How's that for a life lesson? Go somewhere new.

What would be Paul's response to this vision? Would he be like Jonah and run from God's command to go to a new place and preach the message of repentance and faith? Paul would go. He would immediately. I can

picture Paul almost starting to walk down the beach into the water seeking to go, forgetting that he will probably need a boat. So, things are starting to come together now. Here they are poised and ready. God has brought them to Troas the port city in which boats left to go to Macedonia. Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading for the Gospel. Once the team discussed the vision...they concluded. Paul did not decide to go for the group. They concluded together this was God's plan. Literally, they thought this through with sanctified minds and concluded together. How long did it take for the group to obey the call of God? Immediately they found a boat and sailed away. The Gospel would for the first time in history cross the Aegean Sea headed to Macedonia. Probably, the people in Macedonia didn't even realize what was coming. God would help them and that region would never be the same again.

Before they got on the ship however, in Troas, Paul picked up a hitchhiker. He would acquire a new friend who would never leave his side. He found someone named Luke. A doctor and a writer. Luke would later write the Gospel of Luke, and the Book of Acts - kind of the sequel. If Paul had his way, he never would have found Luke - the guy who would write all of this stuff down for us, centuries later.

Sometimes the bumps in life are areas of growth. Sometimes the bumps in life are there to guide us down a different path. There are times that I wonder if when I'm held up in traffic, that I'm being saved from something else down the road. Or if something didn't go as planned, is it a blessing in disguise? This result is far better than that one I hoped? When we moved from Nebraska to Woodburn, Oregon, we had to sell our house. But our house didn't sell. And didn't sell. And didn't sell. We had looked at houses in Woodburn, but had to abandon buying, because we couldn't sell our house. We lived in the church's parking lot, in a house provided by the church. The house was literally carved from the parking lot. We finally sold our house 10 months later in March - at roughly the same time we got the call to move to Oregon City. If we would have sold our house in Lincoln, we would have bought in Woodburn, and had a house for one year before we moved here. We were better off not to have sold our house - or we would have taken a bigger bath in Woodburn. That bump in life was a blessing.

And I'm cognizant that today is Mother's Day. And many of you have little ones that were not exactly planned - maybe even got in the way of your life plans, or your family's wishes, or whatever. It's not a bump in the road, it's a bump in the belly. And for most of us, even if it wasn't planned - it provided a blessing. Of course, there could be pain and heartache as well. But that's a part of life. We have to trust the journey.

Do we trust God enough to follow Him or would we rather that He follows us? May be flexible in our plans, that He might mold us and make us along our travels. You can write your plans on the back of a paper plate - but look for surprises along the way. And the family of God said, AMEN.