

Sermon, May 25, 2025
"Recalculating"
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Delivered by Rev. John Balicki
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine

So do you know what this is? (Hold up DeLorme Atlas and Gazetteer). Did you used to use it? Do you still own one? I think I'm now on my twelfth copy. I was always a little kid who loved highway maps – loved em!! As a 10 year-old I would direct my mother on family vacations – turn up ahead – get in the left lane! I can't tell you how pleased I was when I first moved to Maine in 1976 and discovered they had a book, a bound book of all the roads, ponds, mountains, trails in the state of Maine.

Of course remember what we did before that when we got directions to someone's house on a piece of scrap paper or a napkin? Second right after the Citgo station (now unfortunately turned into a Cumberland Farms), left at the corner with the old maple (now unfortunately reduced to a stump to prevent power lines from falling), veer right at the red barn (collapsed?, repainted?). It was a miracle we ever got anywhere – or maybe you're still trying to find your Uncle Herman's house?

Then came the days of GPS. If you were a geek, you got one right away. A Luddite like myself – Well I resisted a long time and was of course introduced to it by my children and now I have to admit it works pretty well. But there's still one problem. Whether you're a gps lover or hater, there is fairly unanimous agreement that the most hated phrase, in the most hated voice is . . . "recalculating". Always said in such an even tone of voice when the gps perceived that we didn't turn where we were supposed to. Which leads to a screaming match between driver and machine. Tell me sooner when to turn! I know where I'm going. Recalculating, recalculating. The Urban Dictionary defines "recalculating" as "A polite way of saying "you screwed up, idiot, try it again". But is now also used as a term to describe a person's life when it does not go as planned. That is where the theological implications of recalculating apply which we're now going to get to with what's left of this sermon. What do we do when life doesn't go as planned?

Our first lesson from the Acts of the Apostles feels like a lesson in RECALCULATING. We follow Paul and Barnabas on their second missionary journey which follows like a Rick Steeves travelogue on a journey around the upper Mediterranean. They planned to head to Asia, RECALCULATING. They tried to head toward Bithinia but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. What was it? Detour? Construction? Road closed? RECALCULATING

They head for Troas and Paul has a vision similar to Peter's last week. A man in Macedonia pleads for Paul to come there and save them. RECALCULATING. Hop the next ferry for Samothrace. Finally they land in Philippi described as a Roman colony in

Macedonia which means it was somewhat recently settled. What does Paul do when the Sabbath rolls around? As an observant Jew he looks for a synagogue. This is where Paul does much of his preaching on his missionary journeys. Does he find a synagogue? No. This would suggest that there were either few Jews living in this city, or that they found it unwise to publicly worship the God of Israel. The attitude of the Gentile residents of the city must have been anti-Jewish, and would explain no mention of a synagogue. RECALCULATING.

The second best option would have been a “place of prayer” located outside of town, beside the river. Such places of prayer were centuries old -it’s what the exiled Jews used in Babylon. It seemed they were not even sure of finding a place of prayer in Philippi. RECALCULATING. And where was this man from the vision that pleaded with Paul to come? He finds a group of women instead. RECALCULATING. And who were these women? Part of the many poor and marginalized women in this colony? No Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth that only the wealthy could afford so she was a woman of means RECALCULATING.

Mitzi Smith writes:

It is as a Jewish male and as a Roman citizen that Paul stands before Lydia’s household to preach the good news. We do not know what Paul preached; we just know that the audience gave him their eager attention and responded as expected by being baptized. However, unlike the mixed crowd at Pentecost, there is no mention of repentance. This absence could be because Lydia and her people are already worshipers of the God of Israel. Perhaps, that which Lydia considers good news is partially demonstrated in Paul’s gracious administration of the baptism ritual without burdensome stipulations.

The absence of any mention of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit like at the home of Cornelius may also be an acknowledgment that the Spirit was already operative in Lydia’s life and ministry. In Acts God’s Spirit moves as it chooses, inhabits whom it will, and is not confined to a particular routine or pattern. Sometimes the Spirit falls on Gentiles before they are baptized as with Cornelius and his household. God’s Spirit precedes us; God is omnipresent. God looks upon and hears all people; God’s Spirit falls upon, fills, moves human beings as and when God desires.

Which gets us ready for the feast of Pentecost in two weeks. Another adventure in RECALCULATING. One could say the history of the early Church was one grand adventure in RECALCULATING. So let’s conclude with three examples of RECALCULATING: one global, one communal, one personal.

The global relates to our baptismal promise of the morning when we promised to “safeguard the integrity of God’s creation”. Now you could have marched in here turned to pg. 304 or 305 of the BCP and said, “That’s not part of our baptismal promises! And you’d be right! Borrowed it from the Anglican Church of Canada. Very partial to Canadians right now for reasons that don’t need to be explained but they actually came up with this one in 2013. Let’s take just one aspect of safeguarding creation and look at climate change. You could compare the whole debate to one giant car trip where the folks in the front seat are saying, “We’re going to be fine. This isn’t a problem. We’re going to get there” and the people in the backseat are going “We’re heading to disaster, turn around, RECALCULATING”! The Episcopal Church is solidly with the folks in the backseat.

The communal relates to an initiative by Bishop Lane some ten years ago or so called, “Finding God in the neighborhood”. This passage from Acts was his favorite scripture because it illustrated so well Paul finding God outside of the synagogue with people he didn’t expect to encounter. It relates to our discovery that “hey not many people are walking through the doors and if we’re going to be a Church of service, the mission field is out there”. The open question still is “How do we do it?”

But individually, where are we saying about some situation in our life– “I don’t want to turn there, I don’t want to do that, I know my way, I know my way and where is Uncle Herman’s anyway?” The Holy Spirit could be described as nothing more than the annoying voice of RECALCULATING when life throws us it’s twists and turns, when we are afraid to go somewhere new, let go of something old. Can we learn today from Paul and Lydia that RECALCULATING is the Holy Spirit in our midst? And can we learn from Lydia’s story the great example of the need to gather together; to open hearts and minds to the word of God; and be fearless in using the power of goodness and truth in leadership.