

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

May 13, 2007

Text: Acts 16:9-15

Pr. Robert Goldstein

"Heading For Macedonia "

"During the night Paul had a vision." So opens the first reading for today. The apostle Paul is given a vision to bring good news of Jesus Christ to the people of Macedonia near modern day Greece. And what happens? "We immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them."

Here is the witness of people of God driven by their vision to act, to take risks, to suffer for their newer vision of the faith and ultimately to triumph by the grace of God. In the history of Christianity it is those who have been given such visions and have acted upon them that have carried on the good news in Jesus Christ to new ears, new eras, new worlds.

No less so for St. Francis. One night in 1990 you had a vision. You had a vision that God was calling you to a new Macedonia, the Macedonia where straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people of God were calling out for some good news in a church and a world that did not listen to them.

And you possessed that good news: that in baptism we are all children of God. That as God's children, straight or LGBT, you at St. Francis had heard the call of God, the call to bring a lesbian clergy couple to be your pastors. This was the vision you had one night from God. And immediately, like Paul, you tried to cross over to this Macedonia with, Ruth and Phyllis, fellow children of God through baptism, bringing the good news that God welcomes all persons, regardless of their sexual identity, to baptism and to the fullness of the Eucharistic life.

But the crossing over to Macedonia was rough. The swells of the Lutheran sea did everything to sink your boat and your vision. There has been suffering. There have been sacrifices. But you were on the way to your Macedonia, you began to bring the good news of the inclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ to the wider church and to the world. And here we are. The vision continues as we all work together to further that vision you had one night.

As Ruth and Phyllis were called to new ventures in the Gospel your vision was renewed. You saw what now lay ahead. You saw the need to recommit to that vision by calling a pastor to lead –and, by the grace of God, you have called me. While there were many swells in the Lutheran sea that pushed against your boat heading to Macedonia, there were many others in the ELCA who were pressing your boat forward. Many there were and I was one of them. But you need to know there are many others still out there working tirelessly with you to get you to Macedonia.

At the opening of the 2007 Synod Assembly at Reno, NV the Synod declared, as it always does, that St. Francis and First United, no longer constitutionally congregations of the synod, are nevertheless accorded the right of voice at the synod assembly deliberations. Why do they do this? Let me put it this way. The synod is a like a family that has had an awful row and two members of the family leaving: St. Francis and First United. Every year synod gives us a voice, because like any divided family that cares –they don't know quite what to do with us, but they want us to know that we still belong to the

family. It is an awkward situation for all concerned. And what is happening? The rest of the family is slowly coming to the realization that St. Francis and First United are just way ahead of them. We're getting closer to our Macedonia.

Now my ministry is another development of your vision you had one night in 1990. And just as with St. Paul, as we venture on in that vision, we will meet new challenges and new opportunities on the voyage to our Macedonia. Now our vision and our voyage has picked up a new leader, a pastor-elect, Dawn Roginski, who will bring her gifts of ministry and also her love, to help us on our voyage.

Dawn is the first of our Pastors of Parish Programs as you laid out the concept in your vision. You and I will be her mentors as she learns to apply her treasury of gifts to ministry at St. Francis. We will be ordaining her -extra ordinem, because the Lutheran church is still lagging behind us and will not ordain her. But we know assuredly that she has heard the Call to ministry and that God has brought her to our boat as we head to Macedonia. Father Evan had marvelous and wise words last week about Dawn's coming to us. There will be expectations placed on her, but let her grow and live in the Spirit in her own way as she does her ministry, just as we have lived out our vision together. We will give her some structure. But she will express the creative power of the Holy Spirit within and outside that structure. Let us always be open to learn new things, because that's how we will get to our goal of justice in the church.

Dawn's ministries remind us that while we continue the prophetic task of sailing our boat to Macedonia, the priestly tasks of ministering to those who are on the boat, or who swim to the boat, the priestly tasks of parish programs for the upbuilding of the community in St. Francis and in the Duboce Triangle, the Castro and the Noe Valley, these priestly tasks are as integral as the prophetic task. In other words what use is our stand for sexual inclusivity in the wider church, if we were to ignore the spiritual and temporal needs of our congregation and community? Jesus was both prophet and priest; herald of good news and healer of affliction.

This is where we are today and it is very exciting. One night you had a vision. You got up and set sail immediately towards your Macedonia. You are almost there. We can see the coast now. Let us keep on rowing hard. Let us pull on board those who have been wounded and let us care for their healing. We are almost there. Almost there. Dawn joins us to strengthen us for the remainder of the journey. Welcome her with me with your love, your openness and your support. Good job St. Francis! Amen

St. Francis Lutheran Church
152 Church Street, SF, CA 94114-1111
Phone: (415) 621-2635; Fax: (415) 621-8819
E-mail: StFrancisSF@sbcglobal.net
www.st-francis-lutheran.org