

Easter 6C; May 1, 2016

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 16:9-15

Paul converts Lydia, the first European convert, to Christ

Rev 21:10, 22, 22 – 22:5 Nothing unclean will enter the new Jerusalem; only those in the Lamb's book of life

John 5:1-9

Jesus heals the man at the pool of Bethesda: simply, no incantations

Becoming resolved to a circumstance, to a limitation, can become a way of life. But then, did the reality of this being a mission for 30 years stop us from becoming a parish? No. Have the challenges of keeping this shared home in good repair resign us that we cannot also find the resources to impact lives for good across town, or across the globe? No. There has been a force at work in this community that keeps us from letting limitations define us. That force is trust.

When I had finished my freshman year at college, I was placed on academic probation. The reality was that I worked hard, but had not learned in high school the things I should have learned to be ready for college. I remember having a knot in my stomach thinking that my dreams of a career were gone, and I would spend the rest of my life working in my home town, for my father, in the family business. It was that fear that motivated me; I decided that I was not going to let the limitations of my small town school define me. I met with an upper classman from my home town, asking for tutoring in calculus, which he did for me. I met with my teachers, asking for guidance. I changed from studying in my dorm room, to studying in the library – to have a new environment for my new commitment. Two years later I made the dean's list. I wasn't aware at that time of God's personal relationship with me. So I couldn't articulate that it was trust in God that fueled that change. But I definitely remember an awareness inside me that I knew I could do more than I was giving myself credit for. As I have had more experience with my spiritual journey, now I know that the awareness I felt in me is the work of the Spirit of God present in me. My trust in that awareness has been rewarded many times over in my life.

Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda who had been ill for 38 years - without any fanfare whatever. There was no mud made out of spit; no demand that demons leave him and move into a herd of nearby pigs; he simply said, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' After this man being ill for so long, it seems that he had given up. No one else even tried to help him anymore. He had become part of the patina of the town. He wasn't noticed anymore. It had become so much his way of life that he didn't even try to go to the healing pool where local tradition said he could be healed.

But he trusted Jesus. He must have. Because he responded to Jesus' instruction to get up, roll up his mat – because he wasn't coming back, and get walking. He decided to trust, and his trust was rewarded.

The Book of Acts describes all four missionary journeys of Paul into Asia Minor and Europe. In Chapter 16 we read that Paul did not go into the province of Asia because the Holy Spirit had told him not to. Then they headed for Bithynia, but the Spirit told him not to, so they headed for Troas. Then Paul had a vision about a man from Macedonia pleading for him to come there. He immediately left for Macedonia, trusting that God was calling him to preach about Jesus there. It was in Macedonia that they met Lydia, converted her to Christ, baptized her and her household; Lydia became a strong supporter of Paul's ministry.

Paul showed unwavering trust, and his trust was constantly rewarded; not without persecution, but with fulfillment and the exhilarating sense of purpose of doing God's will. The limitations in his path certainly did not define him.

Trust is a critical element of faith. The Bible says that we can trust God because he is completely trustworthy.

Revelation describes in exciting detail what the new Earth will look like, when God's Kingdom comes to us. There is no Temple there, because there is no need for a Temple to mark God's presence. God's presence is everywhere; God's presence is WITH us and IN us. There is no longer a need to remind us where we might go to look for God. Some of the imagery of the Book of Revelation can be challenging to understand. But the passage today is so beautiful and powerful that it has spoken to me for many years. I remember our two daughters asking when they were little girls, what heaven looks like. I read them this passage. And I trust it to be true. And that trust in the presence and reality of heaven has strengthened my faith.

By our trusting in Christ, your name and mine are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 20:12-15). Through that trust, we can have faith that his Spirit lives with us and in us; and because of that relationship with him, there is no limitation that can define us. THAT transformation of Jesus from death to life in the Spirit, and his Spirit being available to live with each of us, is the message of Easter.

(Romans 8:31) ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

(Romans 8:37-39) ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I pray that you and I can hold onto the image of our life with God in us; that we may hold on to our trust in him; and that this trust may keep our faith strong, defeating any limitations that try to define us. We are children of God. Amen.