Acts 16:9-15 NIV

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.

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Dear Friends of God,

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Ministry is a group effort. We all bring something into the picture.

Everyone says this is *Paul's* second missionary journey. Paul was the leader of the journey and he had special role within that missionary journey, so you're not wrong to call it Paul's missionary journey.

Yet his success is not his own. For one thing, his success relied entirely on Jesus and the Holy Spirit—without their work nothing is successful. But humanly speaking, Paul's success is a group effort. Ministry needs people. Paul needed help.

Our passage starts with a vision.

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> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

This vision came to Paul. No one else had this vision; just one person. Paul after all is the apostle and the Spirit is upon him so we can expect him to receive special visions for ministry.

This was a very disruptive vision for Paul. He had wanted to travel to Bithynia, a prosperous region to the north. But somehow the Holy Spirit stopped those plans, preventing them from entering. Paul wanted Bithynia, but now he was being called to Macedonia.

It was not merely a personal vision for Paul. It was the gospel's movement into Europe. God overwhelmingly spoke to Paul, who shared it with his companions and they felt compelled to

bring the good news to Europe. This vision is a sign of the gospel's march to the ends of the earth. It was the start of a powerful transformation of a whole continent.

It was a vision that called the church to go where the gospel is needed. Come and help us. We need the gospel. We need the life that comes from Jesus and his resurrection. We need what the Spirit has given you. God still calls us to tell the good news. It can be in unlikely, unexpected places. God can disrupt things and call us to places we didn't plan to go.
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God can disrupt us right here, too. At one point in my time here we planned to put on the Christianity Explored course. It's a course that introduces the gospel to our friends and neighbours who are curious about the gospel by going through the Book of Mark, which starts out with "The beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah." We had prepared, but no one had signed up. So we put a notice in the bulletin that the course was postponed. We decided to do a dry run through the course for those who were leading it, and then do better work at preparing the congregation to invite their curious friends to it. But we hadn't announced it from the pulpit that we were postponing the course. We had announced from the pulpit that we were running the course in the weeks prior, but we hadn't announced the postponement. And unknown to us, someone was watching our services each week and had decided to take the course and hadn't heard that it was postponed. So just as the team was sitting down to go through the dry run, in came two men, one older and one younger, who had taken the bus in the freezing cold from downtown Kitchener to take the Christianity Explored course. The younger man was very curious about Christianity had asked the other, a Christian, to go with him. We were not prepared for this. But we quickly recognized that the Spirit was moving here, and someone right in front of us was asking us to come and help him learn more about Jesus. So we ran the course, and he came to faith. He isn't able to join us in the large group of worship, but he participates with us each week online and joins the potlucks in the Downtown Community. We were going to do one thing, but the Spirit had other plans for us.
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The vision remains: come and help us. We need the gospel. We need the hope, the assurance, the comfort, and the purpose that only Jesus can give us.

It's interesting to notice that at this very point when the gospel was crossing over into a new continent, that the writer of the gospel speaks in terms of *we* and *us*. In verse ten we read,
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> 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.

Here we come to the first time the author of Acts (traditionally Luke the Physician) inserts himself and others into the narrative. This may have been the place where Luke joined the team, and maybe even one of the reasons why God closed the door to Bithynia—so that Luke could join them in Troas and become the person who wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else. Maybe even to be Paul's personal doctor.
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But here we notice a shift from *they* to *we*. Up to this point it had been about Paul's work. Paul went here and did this. Paul went there and that happened. He had colleagues, and the narrative speaks about "They" doing this or that. Verse 8 says, "They came to Troas." But the colleagues seem to have very much a secondary role to Paul. There is a team, but until this point it was all Paul all the time. Paul is the main human actor in these stories.

And now it changes. Now that the gospel was about to step over a continental boundary and make its way to the ends of the earth there is a shift. *We* got ready to leave at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called *us* to preach the gospel to them.

This is such a subtle element in the text that its easy to overlook it. Yet it is so encouraging for those who engage in ministry. Ministry is often equated to those high-profile people, like ministers and elders and deacons and the key ministry leaders. We tend to identify a hero or a big personality, or a strong leader as the key to success.

Yet ministry is made possible by those who often are not seen and at times are not named. Our text reminds us that it takes a team for ministry to be effective. All are co-labourers. Paul was certainly a big part of it. But he wasn't the only part of it and he certainly wouldn't have been successful if he was the only part of it.

Who discerned the power of the vision? The team did. "We got ready at once to leave for Macedonia concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." They all concurred that they had to follow where God was leading.

And so the story continues as a team. *We* set out by boat from Troas, *we* stopped at Samothrace, *we* set out for Neapolis, *we* landed up in Philippi, *we* met a dealer in purple cloth. Paul is not alone. Silas, Timothy, Luke are with him, joining in discernment, joining him in telling the gospel, labouring together.

And then the ministry team expands. They meet Lydia, who comes to faith and is baptised along with her whole household. She doesn't just receive the gospel and soak it all in. She immediately offers what she has to the team. She generously opens her home, proclaiming the gospel through her open doors. The ministry moves to a new level with new participants. A new church is born, the first one in Europe

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Paul recognized this. In his letter to the Philippian church, he starts out joyfully giving thanks to God

> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

The church that he started that day at the river became a strong team with Paul, actively involved in God's work in the church and the world. They were partners with Paul, fellow workers in the kingdom.

As we celebrate all that God has done in ministry this year at Community CRC, we thank God for all those who are part of the team. We did it together. Some took on prominent, high profile roles. Others worked behind the scenes. Some offered gifts of hospitality, others offered gifts of patience, teaching, service, love and caring. Yet, we did it together. God called us to tell the good news; he has moved us out into ministry. His word has opened hearts, and open hearts have resulted in open doors.

As we see so clearly today and so clearly in scripture, ministry is a group effort. Thank God for moving us all to serve together in Christ's name. AMEN