

# The St. John's Pulpit

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## HELP!

*Acts of Apostolic People 16:9-15*

Season of Easter, May 1, 2016  
The Rev. Dennis W. Foust, PhD, Senior Minister

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A couple of days ago, when our daughter, Rachael, was a preschooler, she helped me. I was writing on a doctoral paper and my home desk was set up in a corner of a small room which also doubled as the toy room. As I was writing, Rachael came and stood beside me. She said, “Daddy, look at my picture.” She held up to me a beautifully colored drawing depicting her 3 year old perspective of ‘something.’ Barely lifting my head, I glanced her way and said, “That’s pretty sweetie.” She would not be deterred. The next thing I knew, Rachael had climbed up the stacks of books and crawled across the desk to plop her little three year–old bottom atop my computer keypad. She stuck out the paper in front of me and said, “Daddy, see it with your eyes.” As I said, Rachael helped me that day. She helped me put my priorities back in order. Her paper was more important than mine.

*Life is a wonderful teacher; and the longer you live, the more you can learn  
– if, you’ll pay close attention.*

*Life can help you hear God even when you are not listening.*

*Life can help you sense God’s Presence even when you are not searching.*

*Life can help you notice the needs of others; even those needs you have been ignoring.*

Today’s scripture story tells about one of those days when the early church was learning how to live the resurrection life by continuing the ministry of Jesus. They were learning how to hear God although they were not listening; see God although they were not searching; and notice needs which they had been ignoring.

In the midst of a dream, Paul saw a man of Macedonia standing before him and pleading, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” This story of Paul entering Macedonia was important in the early days of Jesus’ followers, as they were now taking the teachings of Jesus into the

new context of Europe. Paul understood the Macedonian man in his dream to represent a calling from God. Yet, when Paul arrived in Macedonia, there were NO men. The first responders to the Good News of Jesus' message in Europe were women who gathered in Philippi, the largest city of Macedonia. Lydia, a business woman and some other women were faithful to God by gathering for prayer. They were the Macedonians found by Paul.

So, here is Paul, following God into a new place because someone was requesting his 'help.' Then, when he arrived in Philippi, Paul did not find what he expected. Yet, Lydia and her entire household became Jesus' followers and through the years ahead, the Philippian Church became one of the healthiest and most faithful. Paul initiated a relationship with them.

You understand Paul's experience. The longer you live as a Jesus follower, continuing his ministry, you are learning how to hear God in new ways by creatively responding to the needs of others who are needing your 'help.' And, then, when you respond to the needs of others, often, what you expect is not what you experience.

*The longer you follow Jesus, the more you learn –*

*How to recognize God's voice even when you are not listening –*

*How to sense God's Presence and leadership even when you are not searching – and*

*How to respond to the needs of others, even those needs you may have been ignoring.*

This is what happens when one of your friends or a family member is overcome with grief and sorrow and you realize that your ministry to them is comfort and encouragement.

This is what happens when one of your co-workers is trying to move past guilt and shame over a broken relationship and failure and you offer grace and reassurance.

This is why you volunteered to minister to the homeless this winter through Room in the Inn.

This is why you are compelled to offer hospitality to persons who are devalued in our society.

This is why you teach our children and youth in the life and ministry of St. John's and why you will volunteer to serve our children in this summer's Vacation Bible School.

This is why you adopted into your lives and homes forty Lost Boys from South Sudan.

This is why you ask a friend questions that help you know them and understand them better.

This is why you are building walls in Lasater Hall for our next Habitat House project.

This is why you initiate a new effort of ministry sensitivity during Mental Health Awareness Month to strengthen your ongoing help of NAMI – National Alliance for Mental Illness.

This is why you make sandwiches to feed the homeless each month.

This is why you pack weekend lunch backpacks for children living in poverty.

This is why you are kind to that friend at school when several other kids bully him.

This is why you tithe to God in support of our annual budget ministry plan and make current financial gifts beyond your tithes to support our Second Century Endowment Campaign.

This is why you invest in community building through QC Family Tree.

This is why you are making gifts to our Global Mission Offering to support another teacher at Nyrwang Village School in South Sudan.

This is why you are compelled to be part of a congregation in the Center City of Charlotte.

This is why you open the space of these facilities to house the homeless 365 days a year.

This is why you care about the quality of our public education system for all children.

This is why you offer worship for the homeless each Sunday through Hope Chapel.

This is why we begin a new partnership with Friendship Baptist Church to work against racial segregation by participating in Circles of Hope to create racial friendships.

A few months ago, a man approached me after a public meeting and said, “St. John’s is known to be a church that serves people all around Charlotte. How can I help lead our church to become more like St. John’s?” I responded, *“We do not claim to be perfect. We are not sure how to live with sincerity and humility while also promoting ourselves as a servant church. We worship God as Compassion and then we are compelled to follow Jesus serving and loving our neighbor. It is the way we live out our discipleship. By serving the needs of our neighbors, we hear Jesus saying, ‘As you serve the least of these, you are serving me.’”*

Friends, life teaches us much if we pay attention. So, this morning, once again, receive my affirmation for how you listen for God’s voice, sense God’s Presence and leadership and respond to the needs of others by listening and watching for those appearing before us saying, *“Come, and help us.”* Perchance you have allowed other important work to crowd out your involvement in serving the needs of other persons, consider this morning’s message my attempt to crawl on the desk of your life and sit down in front of you asking you to hear God’s Voice, sense God’s Presence and notice the needs of other persons which you may be ignoring. I just want to help you help others.

Amen and AMEN!