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THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE BUILDER FOR CHRIST

- I. He calls men to ministry
- II. He opens the hearts for those who hear
- III. He moves the hearts of believers to works of service

Fellow recipients of God's grace,

Christ came to establish His kingdom. He did that through living His life perfectly as our substitute and then dying in payment for our disobedience. In the process He defeated Satan. He conquered death and hell. He has opened the gates of heaven for us. This is what the celebration of Easter is all about, isn't it? It is the celebration of victory.

If we would picture what we have just said, we could use the illustration of this church building. What Christ accomplished was to fulfill every promise God had made in regard to sending a Savior from sin. This was finished on Calvary and proclaimed through the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. It serves as the foundation upon which the whole superstructure of the church stands.

When you look at it this way, you have to conclude that the building of the church has been going on ever since. The Apostles were sent out from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, yes, to the ends of the earth. One might be tempted to think, then, that the Apostles and all those pastors and teachers who followed them were the ones who were responsible for building the Christian Church here on earth. But this would be a superficial view of the building process.

Do you remember what Paul wrote? He said, "Apollos planted, I watered; but God gave the increase." Did Apollos build the church? No, he did not. Did Paul build the church? No, he did not. It was God who was building the church. Did God use Apollos and Paul? Yes, He did. Under the "What does this Mean?" of the Third Article of the Creed we read, "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking for choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord nor come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts sanctifies and keeps me with Jesus Christ in the true faith." This is a reference to God, the Holy Spirit building Christ's church.

In our text for this morning we have an excellent example of the Holy Spirit building the church. We will note first of all the Spirit calls men to ministry. Secondly, the Spirit opens the hearts of those who hear the Gospel. Finally, the Holy Spirit leads believer to works of service.

Listen to the beginning of the text again. **¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.** Paul had been on his second missionary journey. As he left the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia, his desire was to go to the province of Bithynia, but inspired record tells us that the Holy Spirit did not allow them to go there. So, they went to the coastal city of Troas. It was at Troas the Paul received the vision of the Macedonian man pleading for Paul to come to Macedonia and help them. It is at this point that our text takes up the story.

God had work for Paul and his companions to do in Philippi. Having passed through Samothrace and Neapolis, they landed in Philippi. Do you see how the Holy Spirit was directing the course of Paul and his co-workers? When the time for a specific ministry has come God will direct workers to that place. Our synod had no plans for mission expansion in the Gulf Coast area of Texas in 1965, but a group of believers who had taken the name of Redeemer Ev. Lutheran Church in Edna asked for a mission pastor to be assigned to them. It was the Lord's way to begin the mission expansion along the Gulf Coast and in the large cities of Houston and San Antonio. The Lord had the field ready and He called the missionary to begin the work.

Two things are told us about Philippi. The first is that Philippi was a Roman Colony and the second is that it was a leading city. Being a colony meant that the citizenry was Roman. They were not vassals but

true citizens. They possessed all the rights of a person who was born in Rome. The second point the writer Luke makes is that this was a leading city of the district. The population must have been large, which meant that there was a great potential for spreading the Gospel to the people. It also meant that there would be Jews there doing business in such a major population center. This would give Paul the opportunity to bring them the Good News that the Messiah had come and that He is Jesus. It was Paul's custom to go to the Jews first and present the truth that the Messiah had come, that He had kept the law for them and all people and that He had died to cancel their debt of sin and that they could live the victory Jesus had won for them by faith.

In fact this is what Paul did. It says here, **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. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.** This is powerful isn't it? It was not Paul's skill in communication that captured Lydia's heart. It was not his golden oratory that convinced Lydia of what Paul said. It says here **that the Lord open her heart.**

This is quite clear. Paul speaks to the women about Jesus. The Spirit works through message and the message is understood and believed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul is the minister and steward of the Word and the Holy Spirit is the Operative. He is the One who opens hearts and implants faith in those hearts. He has done that kind of open heart surgery on each one of us. This is how we all have come to know Jesus, to trust in Him.

Now look what follows. **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.** Of course, Paul considered Lydia a believer. He had baptized her. Would he take the position that she would have to do a period of internship before she could begin to do works of service to her Lord Jesus? Certainly not! When the Spirit of the Lord opens your heart and makes you a believer, you are ready to do works of service to the honor of your Savior.

We all fit into this category, don't we? When the load of guilt has been washed away and God has declared us forgiven and purified, we look for ways to express our gratitude to the Lord Jesus for His forgiving love. These are called fruits of our faith. Jesus uses the picture of the vine and the branches. Once we are grafted into Jesus, the Vine, it becomes our very nature as branches to bear fruit. It is our joy to do this.

I am quite sure that Lydia did not consider it a burden to have Paul and his companions as house guests. She wanted them to come and stay at her house. It says here that she persuaded them to come to her house. She wanted to provide for them. She saw it as a way of supporting the ministry of the Word. If Paul didn't have to work at a secular job to live, he could spend more time spreading the Word about Jesus. Lydia was willing to make this possible. Do you see how the Spirit of God was building Christ's church?

Isn't this the way it is in our personal relationships with others? We enjoy doing things for those around us. We look for ways to help. We find out about a need and we step in to satisfy that need as we are able or we join with others to meet the need. Hurricanes, tornados, floods or fires present opportunities for us to help. The illness of a friend or neighbor gives us the chance to express our gratitude to Jesus for His love. We do it because we want to. We are compelled by the love of Jesus to respond. As a matter of fact, the Apostle John in his first letter says that if we see the need of someone and do nothing to help, how does the love of Christ live in us? The answer is that it doesn't. Faith without works is dead.

I know that you all are charitable in your own way. You don't need to ride on the back seat of a convertible with the horn blowing to let everyone know what you have done. Love does not expect anything in return. Love simply loves to give.

This is also the way the Holy Spirit works in our midst and through us and through our gifts. He opens our hearts for the support of the kingdom of Christ in the worldwide ministry of our church body. The Spirit is not limited by the number of people in a given place. He is not limited by the economical status of our country. He is not limited by language barriers, or by cultural barriers. He just keeps on building for Christ. And He builds through you. Certainly you can also see this in the lives of those who are members of The Builders for Christ. They use their time and skills to work in building churches and church facilities. They do it as a labor of love. The Spirit of our God raises up believers to do works of service. Follow the Spirit's lead in your life to be a builder for Christ. Amen.