

Sarah's Dad was the pastor of Fort Dodge, Presbyterian Church for 18 years. The staff gave him a vanity license plate that said, GRAC-B2U. Grace b2U. Dave was driving down hwy 20 one day on business and a car pulled up next to him with a couple of young girls driving and riding. One of the young girls held up a sign that read, "And also with you." Dave had a good laugh and waved at the girls. Then he noticed the girl with the sign. It was the former college roommate of his youngest daughter Rachel. He laughed even harder. The passenger had no idea she was sharing grace with her old college roommates Dad. It was just coincidence. They all laughed. The license plate has gotten Dave out of several tickets too. Grace –B2U. Grace works in amazing ways.

One scholar says in a our reading from Acts we see the movement of the Holy Spirit in sending Paul a vision and three aspects of grace:

common grace in that Lydia was already a believer in God; justifying grace in that she opened her life to the good news of Jesus Christ; and sanctifying grace in that Lydia immediately put her faith to work sustained by the teaching of Paul. Common graces are visible expressions of God's goodness that we all notice. Common graces come in the forms of blessings for physical sustenance, pleasure, learning, family, etc. Justifying grace is the work of Christ. This is the grace of God that accomplishes the purposes of salvation. Sanctifying grace enables us to live into justified grace as faithful Christian disciples. There are many sanctifying graces. Like communion, bible studies, fellowship time, and Christian worship. Sanctifying grace helps us see where the Spirit of God is at work in the world. Sanctifying grace is what makes the church relevant. It sustains us through Christ.

How many of you have seen Pat Robertson the televangelist? I'm a Presbyterian, so I sometimes cringe at Pat Robertson. Dan Clendenin in his blog Following Jesus, says "When [Pat] stretches out the palms of his hands, squinches his eyes tight, and announces a healing for a specific person with a specific malady in a far away city empowered by the Holy Spirit, 'I'm dubious.'

Robertson claims to know how and why the Holy Spirit moves, where the spirit is sending us, and what the Spirit wants us to do. I believe in the Holy Spirit. It is a confession we make together every Sunday but when a televangelist asks me to put my hand on the TV to pray for a vision from God...to pray for grace....to discern where the Spirit is moving and moving me.... I hesitate...does the Spirit work that way?

But *Dan Clendenin* writes that's exactly what the apostle Paul claims in this week's reading from Acts—that God spoke to Paul in a "vision." Luke writes that God spoke to Paul and his companions three times. First, the Holy Spirit “prevented” them from preaching in Asia (Acts 16:6), then the Spirit of Jesus “prohibited” them from entering Bithynia (16:7), and then Paul had a "vision" in which he saw a man standing on the sea shore, imploring, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (16:9). Paul concluded that God had spoken to them through that vision, so they set sail. A few days later when they landed in Philippi, "the leading city of that district of Macedonia" (16:12), it was the first time that Paul met Lydia who knew God's common grace. In a grace full moment Paul explained Christ's justifying grace to her in a way that made sense. Then Lydia was sustained in ministry by the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.

People talk about Paul's type of experience with the Spirit all the time. One example might go something like this, "On the way to the store I left late and I caught the train at 8. When I finally got there, just in time, I just happened to see an old friend who knows an old friend who needs a friend. I called him and he said tearfully, 'You are just the person I need to talk to.' I wouldn't have known if hadn't been for that train. God is good.

As a practical matter, I agree with Clendenin that Pat Robertson is way out there when he invokes the authority of the Spirit of God and claims to know the Spirit's movements. Clendenin says, "He's just too crazy for me, and if you asked me why I would appeal to sanctified common sense. In principle, though, I admit the possibility that God *could* "speak" to him or to me or you through trains and coincidence. Strange things happen when we are open to the movement of the Spirit.

But Paul's Macedonian vision raises a tangle of honest and complex questions that do not have a simple answer.” Clendenin asks a marvelous question for modern Christians. We believe in the timeless mysterious work of the Holy Spirit and grace, "So How do we experience the fullness of the Spirit but avoid seeming as crazy as Pat Robertson?" How do you name grace without seeming kooky?

When I performed the funeral for Dot Smith, a beloved member of this congregation, something Spirit-Full happened. Dot's lifelong friend shared with me how Dot always said, "Keep on keeping on." The day after Dot died her friend turned in her daily devotion, the same one she had been reading for years. The devotion for the day was, "keep on keeping on." Her friend was blown away with comfort by common grace. Is that a vision from the Holy Spirit, the great comforter? Nothing could convince me other wise. It is pure common grace. I can't

explain how it works. It just does. There was nothing kooky about it. We knew it was a gift from God because we are learning how God's grace works through sanctification in worship, bible studies, and Christian life together. There is something amazing that happens when folks are open to the movement of the Spirit.

So many folks today think that they don't need the church. They can work on their own. Without the strength of Sanctifying Grace they will burn out and become self-seeking for the latest feel good fads. The work of God is work and requires prayer and open hearts with a vision of what God is calling us to do. We search for signs of grace in the world and seek where the spirit is moving us. Yes, I believe the Spirit is still moving and giving visions; but that doesn't mean you will catch me holding hands with Pat Robertson through my TV. The Holy Spirit is in

here and out there pouring out grace and people want to be a part of God's movement today just like Lydia and Paul.

Someone asked me once what makes the church relevant today? The church family offers sanctifying grace and supports the work of Christ. We offer signs that say,¹ Grace B2U. We teach people to God's grace in the everyday world.

We are justified by Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. We are sent like Paul aware of how the Spirit is moving. We are open like Lydia to hear the Good News of Christ. We are sanctified by the gifts of the church to see God at work in the world in mysterious and loving ways. Amen.

¹ *Reflections By Dan Clendenin*

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