

**Acts 16:6-10 (NIV – 2011)**

<sup>6</sup> Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

<sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” <sup>10</sup> 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.

Dear friends in our Savior,

Last October there were many cries for help coming out of the Northeast part of the United States after the devastating Hurricane Sandy ripped through that area. There were many homes that were completely destroyed and many more that had damage to them. There were people who were hurt, who had nowhere to stay and nothing to eat. And they were crying out for help in this desperate situation. And people responded. Was there any doubt? We see this over and over again throughout our country. When there is a need and a cry for help, people respond. Across the board people are willing to give of themselves to help others who are in need. We saw that with the earthquake in Haiti. We saw that after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. People are willing to help when cries for help go out.

There are cries for help going out around us every single day. They come from those who are desperate. They come from people who thought that they had everything and have found out that they have nothing. They come from those who are searching for relief. They come from people who are hungry and thirsty for something to nourish and quench their souls. And we have everything that we need to answer that cry for help and provide the relief that people are so desperately searching for. ***Come and Help Us!*** This is the cry that goes out and that we will use as our theme.

**Theme: Come and Help Us!**

- 1. God came and helped us**
- 2. God sends us out to help others**

“*Come and help us!*” That was the plea of the man from Macedonia that Paul heard in his vision. He was standing before Paul in a vision begging him for help. We tend to look at people in these desperate situations who have to beg for help because they have nowhere else to go with pity and compassion. And sometimes even with a bit of condescension as we think, “Poor person. I’m glad that’s not me.” Yet, that once was you and me. That once was each one of us who were standing there desperately begging for help. The help that is being talked about here is not the humanitarian aid that is offered in relief in the midst of a tragedy. The help that is the focus of this text before us is the spiritual help that we so desperately need before God in heaven. We think that losing everything in a hurricane or tornado is bad, imagine standing before God with nothing. All the pride and confidence that you had in your own works and own goodness is stripped away before God and there you stand with nothing. You stand there all alone to answer for your sins. You stand there facing the judgment of an eternal separation from God. And you are left with nothing but to fall down before him and beg him, “Come and help me!”

God answered that call. Actually, he answered the call before we even made the plea before him. From the first time that man stood before him, God answered the call in his promise to send a Savior. God answered that call in sending Jesus into the world to be the perfect substitute that we needed for our sin. God answered that call by unleashing all of his wrath and anger at sin against his own Son as he suffered hell so that he could offer to us complete and full forgiveness for every sin and the certainty of life in heaven. God answered that call by raising his Son from the grave and ascending him to the throne of heaven. The plea of humanity—you and me included—was, “Come and help us!” And that is what God did.

Then God answered that call personally when he came to each one of us individually. God personally sent someone into each of our lives to help us know about his love and forgiveness in Jesus and this wonderful gift of life. Maybe it was your parents who brought you to baptism as an infant. Maybe it was a spouse who shared the faith with you and encouraged you to learn more. Maybe it was your children whom you thought you were helping but found out they were helping you. Maybe it was a neighbor or friend who came to you in a time of trouble or difficulty and pointed you to the forgiveness and love that is yours in Jesus your Savior. How awesome to think about how God answered our call by sending someone into your life through whom he provided the help that you so desperately needed.

It is help that we still need! Each week we gather before our Lord, and at the beginning of our service, we lay our sins before him and beg of him to come in his mercy and help us. And each week God through his servant and his Word comes to us to assure us of the eternal help that is ours in Jesus. He reminds us of the gift that has been given and credited to our account. And every week, as we pray in the Lord’s prayer, “Thy Kingdom come,” we pray that God would continue to bring his kingdom into our hearts so that we know our Savior and draw closer to him. And he does.

## 2. God sends us out to help others

But did you notice the prayer that Jesus prayed in our Gospel lesson for today? His desire is not only for us to know his love and grace. Jesus wants all of his church gathered together to know that love and grace. He wants all of his people to be where he is and to see his glory. He finished by praying, **“I...will continue to make you known to them in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them (John 17:26).”** As we gather on this Sunday between the Ascension of Jesus and Pentecost, we are reminded about the work our Savior is doing between his Ascension and his return on the last day. What Jesus is doing is making known to his church on this earth the love that God has for them. And how does he do that? Through you. That was the commission Jesus gave to his disciples before he left: Go and make disciples. You will be my witnesses. Or as Paul said in Ephesians, **“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known (Ephesians 3:10).”** God’s intent was that we who know the relief that God offers would share that relief with people who so desperately need to hear it.

Did anyone catch what Paul did when God came to him and told him to listen to the cries for help from the people of Macedonia. Listen again, **“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 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.** Paul realized that God had a place for him to preach his Word. It wasn’t the place that he thought he was going to go. It wasn’t the people that he thought needed to hear God’s

Word. It was the place that God was sending him. It was a place where Paul could answer the cries of spiritual help that the Macedonian people needed. These people were crying out and Paul listened!

And people all around us are crying out for help. All we need to do is stop and listen for a moment and we will hear the cries for spiritual help. We hear people talk about their fears, shame, guilt, worry, loneliness, sadness and inadequacy. We hear people talk about having no peace, no control, no certainty. These are all cries for spiritual help that God's love in Jesus can give. People talk about the problems they face in life: troubled marriages, troubled children, material needs, the lack of purpose or direction in life, hopelessness, disillusionment and despair. These are cries of help for the spiritual relief only Jesus can give. People face crises in our world every day: death of a loved one, mourning, loss, failure, rejection, family turmoil. They feel worthless have a hard time doing what is right. Every day people around us are crying out for spiritual help to face the troubles and issues of life. And God has already given to us everything that we need to meet those needs and relieve them of their troubles.

As he sent Paul and his companions to Macedonia to help the people there who needed the help of Jesus, as he sent someone into our lives to answer our call for help, he now sends us into the lives of those around us to provide the same help. Our call in Christ is a call to grow in his Word and to go with his Word. It really isn't that hard for us to do. We simply want to listen to those around us and answer their call for help when it comes. In any of the situations that I mentioned, the ultimate need that each person is putting forward is the same: Sin. Every single problem that we face comes as a result of sin. Answering their call is nothing more than pointing people to the answer of that problem: Jesus. And there are many ways to do that. Simply tell them what Jesus has done for you. Tell them what knowing Jesus and his peace means to you and how it has helped you in times of trouble. Use the five finger approach: 1) he lived, 2) he died, 3) he rose, 4) he ascended, 5) he rules. Use the Apostles' Creed that outlines the work and life of Jesus. You have the tools that you need and relief that people so desperately need to answer their calls for help. Recognize the cries and be ready to answer them.

Come and help us! When that cry goes out, people all over the world do all that they can to answer and provide the help that is needed. How much more won't we want to do that for those who so desperately need God's help spiritually? God comes to help us and sends us to help others. As we grow in Christ our Savior, may we also go with the word to answer these cries for help. Amen.