



FAITH AND HOVERBOARDS

May 1, 2016, The Sixth Sunday in Easter, Confirmation Sunday

Acts 16:9-15

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Theme: Faith is like a hoverboard – you know by doing, and both are a little dangerous.

Creator Spirit, breathe life into the ancient words of Scripture we've just heard. Bear them across the ages on your wings; root them in our hearts, and may they coax new life in us. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

In that passage from the Book of Acts that Callum just read, Paul and his traveling companions are sailing around the eastern Mediterranean telling the story of Jesus to anybody who'll listen. In what's now southern Turkey, Paul has a dream that sends them off to Macedonia in the far north of Greece. They hit town after town, and finally land in Philippi, the local big city.

Come the Sabbath, Paul and his companions go down to the riverbank and speak to some women gathered there. They tell them the story of Jesus, and one of them, a woman named Lydia, *"opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul."* Right then and right there she becomes a Christian and is baptized. There are any number of extraordinary things about this story, but one thing is *especially* jolting.

To begin with, in those days it was iffy for men to talk to woman they didn't know in public. Interestingly, Acts notes that Lydia was a *"worshipper of God,"* which was code for a Gentile who attended synagogue but didn't become Jewish. It's also notable that this Lydia was not a local; maybe she was in town for business. And it seems that she was the head of her household, out of the ordinary back then. We are told that Lydia was a *"dealer in purple cloth."* Purple dye was expensive,



so purple cloth was a luxury item. In short, this Lydia was a woman of substance – spiritually, socially and economically.

But none of that is what’s most jolting about the story. What’s strangest of all is *how quickly it all happens*. Lydia hears about Jesus Christ down by the river and she gets baptized – right then and there! You might guess that there was some Q and A between Paul and Lydia, but there was no six hours of new member classes. Nor, as you confirmation class members might have noticed, did Lydia have to attend confirmation class *every* Sunday afternoon for *eight* months in order to join the church!

Actually, this drop-everything-to-be-a-Christian pattern is shot throughout the New Testament. When Jesus calls his disciples, they’re just sitting at their tax-collector tables or mending their fishing nets. He says, “*Follow me,*” and they do, just like that, then and there. Again, you might guess that there was some longer conversation, but the abruptness of all these coming-to-faith stories, stories like the disciples and Lydia, tells us something deep and true. The spiritual fact they hold in their suddenness is this: the decision to follow Jesus Christ is not one you make *after* you have everything about Jesus Christ all figured out. Rather, it’s a decision to go on a journey, and it’s in the course of this journey that you come to know the One you’re doing your best to follow. This means that for you 21 confirmands lined up in the front pews, today’s not so much the *end* of a confirmation journey as it’s the *beginning* of a faith journey.

Like so many of the *really important* things in life, you can’t know about them from the outside looking in; you can only come to know about them from the inside. When it comes to faith, most of what we can know about God comes when we actually try to follow God. Faith comes when we try on faith. *You only come to know it by actually doing it.*

I like anything with wheels. I like cars; I have a bicycle I ride around Central Park; I have a motorcycle out in Michigan. So when hoverboards came out a few years ago, my reaction was, “*Now, that’s cool!*” For those of you over 18 who might not know, a hoverboard is a little two-wheeled mobile platform that you stand on.



It has batteries and an electric motor, and by shifting your weight this way and that you make it go and steer it around. They've been a hot item for teenagers for a couple of years.

Well, hoverboards are a lot like Christian faith. They're like faith in two ways. First way is this: you learn to ride a hoverboard by actually riding a hoverboard. I imagine they come with some printed instructions: *"Put your feet here and lean forward to go forward and do this to go right and do that to go left and do this to spin around."* And there's a gazillion "How to Ride a Hoverboard" YouTube videos on line. Printed instruction and how-to videos might be a help, but the truth is you can only learn to ride a hoverboard by actually doing it. You've got to get on the thing and go. There's no such thing as theoretical hoverboard riding. You know by doing.

It's the same with being a Christian. You learn to be a Christian by being a Christian. Oh, there's a great instruction book called the Bible. There are even YouTube videos about being a Christian. But the simple truth is this: just like hoverboards, you can only learn to be a Christian by doing it. You've got to actually get on the thing and ride it. There's no such thing as theoretical Christianity. You know by doing.

Hoverboards are like Christian faith in second way. Both of them can be dangerous. Hoverboards are dangerous because you can fall off and break your tailbone and because the batteries sometimes melt down. If you ever watch *American's Funniest Home Videos* on TV Sunday nights at seven, you know that there's a whole genre of videos of people wiping out on hoverboards, usually people my age who ought to know better. And you doubtless know that the airlines have banned hoverboards because of battery fires.

Likewise, being a Christian can be dangerous. It was literally deadly for a lot of Jesus' first followers, Paul included. Tradition says he would be executed in Rome not that long after he baptized Lydia. There are still places in this world where being a Christian can cost you your life.



But it can be dangerous in other ways, dangerous even for the likes of you and me. Being a person of faith in secular and skeptical New York is downright countercultural. The 21 of you being confirmed today are not swimming *with* the stream by declaring your faith; you're swimming *against* the stream.

In fact, being a Christian can lead to risky behavior. It can lead to risky behavior like standing up for what's right when it's not popular. Being a Christian can lead to risky behavior like living for giving, not just for getting. Being a Christian can lead to risky behavior like loving other people sacrificially in a world that says it's all about good old number one. Being a Christian can lead to risky behavior like standing up for justice in a world that looks the other way.

The words "Christian" and "Christianity" were not invented until sometime after people started following Christ. At first, Christianity was named by the little Greek word, "*hodos*," h-o-d-o-s. *Hodos* means "the way" or "the road." It was a good name. It captured the exact truth I'm talking about, namely that following Jesus Christ is not an arrival, it's a way; it's a road. Most of us in the room are all on that road. Not a one of us has arrived, not you, not me. Because the truth is this: *the road itself is the teacher*. You only learn the way when you walk the way. Yes, it can be risky, even dangerous, but it's totally worth it.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.