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Easter 6C
Peace, Seattle
May 9, 2010 epk
Acts 16:9-15

CONVERGENCE

It nearly didn't happen.
- My folks were living in Whitefish, Montana, where Dad was serving his first Call.
- Mom had a 2-yr-old and 8-month-old at home, and was newly pregnant with baby #3.

It was Friday, June 8th, my parents anniversary, and the final day of the two-week VBS program. Mom and her VBS class were having ice cream on the lawn, when suddenly a strange and alarming feeling rushed through her; she knew instantly she was in danger of losing the baby.

Rushing home, she yelled for the babysitter to call the doctor while she slipped into bed.
The doctor told her to stay in bed and apply ice packs, and so she did. And her quick action paid off: the bleeding stopped, **and seven months later the baby boy she had nearly lost was born**.

Having expected a Christmas baby, they had the name Kristofer Jon ready. But when Christmas came and went, and then the New Year, they laid that name aside, and picked a new one: **Erik Paul.**

It nearly didn't happen.
Their names were Bob and Erika. The year was 1938. The city was Budapest, Hungary. Bob was a photographer, assigned to take pictures that night at a Purim dance that drew young people from throughout Budapest's Jewish community. But he ended up far more interested in a young woman he met than in making any money taking pictures. They danced the night away.

Before meeting Erika, Bob had applied for a U.S. visa—a golden ticket in those pre-war days.
So when the visa was granted a year after their first encounter, Bob left Budapest for New York, and both he and Erika promised to continue their courtship through letters until she, at last, could join him there.

True to their promise they wrote regularly, and through this correspondence their love blossomed until at last Bob proposed to Erika by sending a phonograph recording of his own voice. She accepted.

But the tide of war was rising. Hitler was on the prowl.
- **Ships stopped crossing Atlantic.**
- **Mail delivery ceased.**
- **Letters, their sole means of communication, were cut off.**
- **And for the next four decades they did not know one another's fate.**

Bob was drafted into the US Army. Erika - meanwhile, was living minute by minute simply trying to survive the Nazi occupation of Hungary.

As a Jew she was forced to sew a yellow star on her clothing as a sign that she was a Jew.
Every day she watched as more of her family members, neighbors, and friends were loaded on trucks and trains destined for death.

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More than once her life seemed destined to end, but each time, she found herself miraculously spared. The end of the war came. They moved on with their lives—without each other.

Forty years later, at a New Year's Eve party in New York in 1978, Bob was introduced to a Hungarian couple who were also guests that night.

The woman looked at Bob and started asking questions about his old life.
- Did his family have a photo studio in Budapest? YES.
- Did he have two sisters? YES.
- Did he know a girl named Erika? YES.

"She was my best friend," the woman continued, "and she told me all about you."

With Erika's address in hand, Bob picked up his pen once more, and their friendship was reborn. Another eleven years would pass before, finally, Bob and Erika were married at the Senior Housing unit that would be their shared home. **But it nearly didn't happen.**

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Read between the lines of the story—Lydia's story—in the 16th chapter of Acts today, and you can see, once more, that it nearly didn't happen—
- **the meeting between herself and a missionary named Paul,**
- **her hearing and receiving the gospel,**
- **her life being forever changed as her home becomes the first Christian house-church on the European continent.**

"Think of all the contingencies of history, that long list of improbable events that led to her encounter with [Paul]," writes Ronald Cole-Turner.[1]
- "Think back to the controversy in the early church over whether the gospel should be shared with Gentiles [at all]." (Acts 15)
- "Or how Paul had to be nudged and redirected again and again to get him to Philippi." (16:1-8)
- Think of how, on two occasions, "the Spirit not only guided Paul and his companions but PREVENTED Paul from going the wrong way." (16:6-7)
- Think of the vision Paul has of the man of Macedonia pleading for help, and Paul's response, with his companions.

It nearly didn't happen, the meeting of this businesswoman, a dealer in purple cloth, and the missionaries. **And here's the point:**

"IT SURELY WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED WERE IT NOT FOR THE INEXPLICABLE CONVERGENCE OF HUMAN FAITHFULNESS AND DIVINE GUIDANCE: PAUL AND LYDIA AND THE HOLY SPIRIT ALL WORKING TOGETHER IN THIS EVENT, THIS "CHANCE" ENCOUNTER BY THE RIVER…Paul does his part and Lydia hers, but it is God who guides all things and works in and through all things, not just for good but for what would otherwise be impossible."

The "inexplicable convergence of human faithfulness and divine guidance."

[1] Ronald Cole-Turner. *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 475-476. The following quotations all come from his commentary on Lydia's story, for which I am indebted.

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Now, sisters and brothers, think on your own life, and ask yourself:
When and where has God been at work within and between the lines of your life, guiding you to a place, a vocation, a person, a decision, that has shaped your life in fundamental ways and brought good news, joy, healing, hope, purpose, or faith into your life and the lives of others?

This Easter season the stories of scripture, particularly from ACTS, have invited us to ask,
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE THE RESURRECTED LIFE?
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PUT OUR TRUST IN THE SPIRIT WHO CALLS US TO "VENTURES OF WHICH WE CANNOT SEE THE ENDING, BY PATHS AS YET UNTRODDEN, THROUGH PERILS UNKNOWN"?[2]

In Lydia's story, the convergence of God's venture and Lydia's own is captured in verse 14:
"The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul."
Her heart was opened, and the world she knew was transformed.

WHAT MOMENT OF CONVERGENCE MIGHT GOD BE PREPARING FOR YOU RIGHT NOW—TODAY?

Is your heart, like Lydia's, prepared? Will you go with God?

It may well be the case that the fruit of this venture that God has in store for you is not yet fully ripe.

BUT…WHEN IT IS…when it is, will you let God take you there? Will you reach out for that fruit and find yourself in the process grasped by the Spirit, your life transformed?

Let us pray:
Lord, you have called us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage. Not always knowing where we go, but trusting that your hand is leading us, your love is supporting us. and your Spirit is guiding us, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

[2] From the service of *Morning Prayer* in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006, page 304.