



**Sunday, June 2, 2024**

**Speaker:** Pastor John VanderWindt

**Scripture:** Acts 18:1-22

**Sermon Title:** Comfort and Companionship in Ministry

**Transcribed by:** Liza Perry

Good morning. It is good to be in the house of the Lord. Today we're going to look at Acts 18. Suzanne (LaRue) said that we need to pray for our city. We've been following Paul as he's been going from one city to the next. And today he's going to be in Corinth. We're going to spend some time looking at his adventures in Corinth and how there are some interesting pieces which show up here. Interesting times in Paul's life. Very dramatic ways in which Paul shares the gospel but also in which he makes a few statements. I invite you to follow along as we look at Acts 18, where Paul is in Corinth.

### **In Corinth**

**18** After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, **3** and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. **4** Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

**5** When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. **6** But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

**7** Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. **8** Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

**9** One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. **10** For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." **11** So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

**12** While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. **13** "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

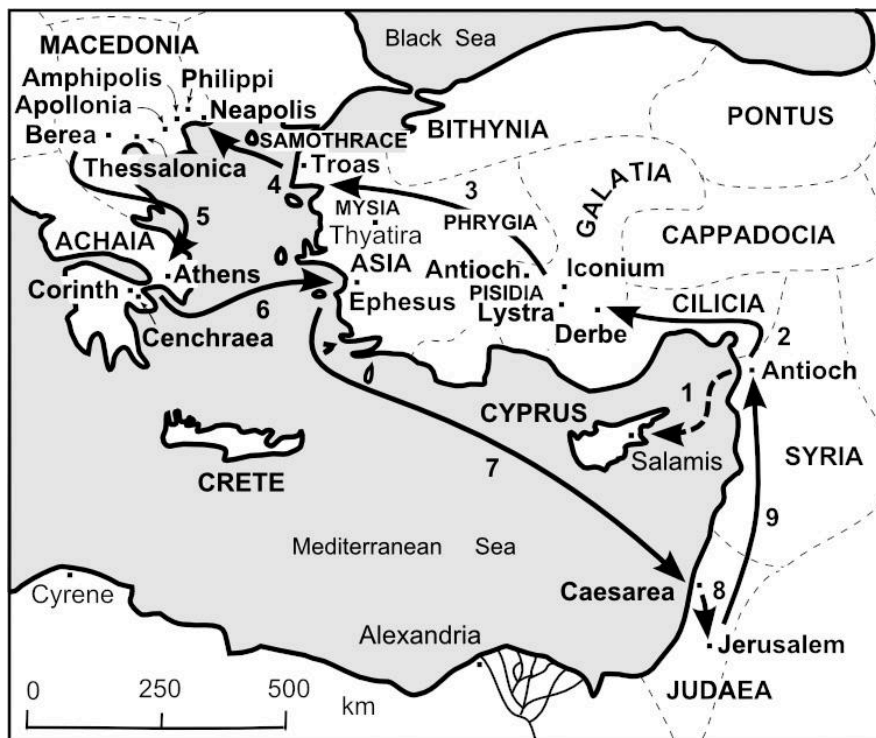
**14** Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. **15** But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.” **16** So he drove them off. **17** Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatsoever.

### Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos

**18** Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. **19** They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. **20** When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. **21** But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. **22** When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we come to You this morning. You have heard us praise Your name and give You all glory, and lift Your name on high. Lord, we now come to hear from You. Lord, we pray that You will open our ears and our hearts. I pray the words I speak may not be mine but of You and that nothing of me may come out, but that You may be glorified in this time. In Your name we pray, Lord. Amen.

Corinth. An interesting place. If I could get the map up here.



This map gives us a place as to where we are. Paul has been on the second missionary journey in which he's been up in this area. He started up in Philippi, he was called over to Macedonia, came down to Thessalonica into Berea, then he came down to Athens, and then he came to Corinth. You'll notice here that Athens and Corinth are not very far from each other. And Corinth is on this isthmus - almost an island with this little land bridge here. And it was a major city of commerce and it was growing at this time. It had been defeated by the Romans earlier, when it was a major Greek city. Now, it's been reestablished as a significant city.

It was known for its bronze. There's a number of places where they talk about Corinthian bronze and how special that was. It was also kind of a port city but not quite a port city, because there is kind of this inland piece and there's a little land bridge. The little land bridge is about 6-12 kilometers wide. It's not very wide. And so people, as they would sail, would unload the wares of the ship. Then they would pick up another ship. Or in some cases, if the ship wasn't too large, they would actually have slaves drag it across the 6 kilometer piece into the other side.

So people would rather do that than sail around this piece. In fact, sailing around this piece was seen as so dangerous, that if a sailor went that way, they would say, "Make sure you have your will made before you go." Because chances are, you won't make it. So people would go through Corinth. So Corinth is this common place. It actually became the capital of Achaia, which is that province down in the bottom. It was a prosperous town but it was also a seedy town. A lot of sailors came through. No blame on sailors, but there is a bit of a reputation for sailors.

It also had the temple of Aphrodite, which is the fertility god and so there was a lot of prostitution and other immoral sexual activity that happened in Corinth. So Corinth had these two sides. The side of great wealth and great commerce. And it had this seedy side of town. And so this is where Paul ends up. He goes to Corinth, and it says there that he met right away. A person named Aquila, whose wife was Priscilla and they were tentmakers.

Now, just an interesting thing about Jewish synagogues compared to our church. For example, how many of you, as a profession, are/were in education? Raise your hand. Okay, notice where the hands are kind of all over, right? If you were in a Jewish synagogue at that time, everybody in education would be seated in one area.

So Paul, when he comes to a Jewish synagogue, sits with the tentmakers because that's what his job was. So it's possible that that's where he met Aquila and Priscilla - because people would sit together according to occupation. I'm glad we don't do that anymore. But they would, then. The other thing is, you'll notice that Paul, it says, was a tentmaker. The Greek word actually deals with the aspect of working with leather. Most of the tents at that time were made of leather. In fact, he comes from Tarsus, and in Tarsus, they were known for this special hair from animals, which would make a black leather from. But he was a tentmaker. He had a trade.

Now, when you think back about what you know about Paul, early on, when we're first introduced to Paul, Paul is a religious leader in the Jewish community. He was basically a full time person in the church. But yet he had a trade. He was taught to be a tentmaker. In fact, in Jewish culture, they have a saying back then that says, "If a father does not teach his child a trade, he makes him out to be a thief," because he won't be able to care for himself. And so Paul, in doing church planting, was bivocational. He understood that, as he goes to a church or to a place, he can't just go in there and say, "Oh, by the way, I'm coming with these great news. I need you to support me." He understood that as he came to these places, that he had to earn a living, and he had to do this well.

In fact, he writes to the Corinthians later on, where he says in **2 Corinthians 11:5-9**, "**5** I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." **6** I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. **7** Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? **8** I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. **9** And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so."

And in **1 Corinthians 2:3-5**, he says, "**3** I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. **4** My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, **5** so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power."

So he understood that it wasn't his own thing. So he was a tentmaker. And he worked there. And in **Acts 18:5**, we see when Silas and Timothy came to Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to the preaching. And here's what we just read in 2 Corinthians where it talks about how he robbed other churches. Timothy and Silas came with a gift (money) from the church in Philippi so that he could preach full time. And that's what Paul did.

So here's Paul, in the city of Corinth, going to the Jews and preaching there. It says there in **Acts 18:4**, "**4** He reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." Again, we see this term 'reasoned.' We are reminded that the Christian faith is not just an emotional journey. It's not just something that, if you get the feeling, then it must be good. It is reasonable. God speaks in reasonable fashion.

And so he continues to preach in the synagogue. And then it says in **Acts 18:6**, "**6** But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

Let me start with the shaking off of the dust. Do you remember another time when people were told that if they are not receptive to the Word of God, to shake off the dust? If you remember when Jesus sent out his disciples and they went into the other cities, he would say to them, "If they do not believe as you leave, shake the dust off your feet, because it will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than it is for this city.

This is an old time Jewish habit. The idea is, "I don't want to take any of your stuff with me. Even the dust off my feet. If I am breaking ground with you, I am breaking ground with you." And so Paul, as a symbol, does it even greater when he takes and shakes his clothes off. He's like, "There is nothing here that I'm going to take with me." And then he uses the phrase, "the blood be on your head." That's a phrase which was used as well before. If you remember when Jesus was in front of Pilate and the Jewish leaders were telling Pilate to crucify him, they added this phrase, "May his blood be on us and our children."

And here we see Paul using that same phrase, "May his blood be on you. I am not responsible for you." This shows us something else about Paul though. Paul understood very clearly that no matter how convincing he was, no matter what arguments he brought up, it was never him who would convince someone else of who God was. It has to be the Holy Spirit working in the person. God may use us. And God does use us, because we know that the preaching of the Word and the hearing of the Word is how people know about Christ, but we can never say, "Oh, you know what? I just had this great argument and they came away and they're like, 'Yeah, I guess there's no other option, is there?'" No, it's not about our arguments. It's about the Spirit.

So Paul realizes, "You know what? I have given you the Word of God. If they choose not to believe, that's not my responsibility. That's left to God. And God works within their hearts." So Paul leaves. And here's the irony of Paul leaving this synagogue. Paul leaves the synagogue and there are two significant people who join him. One is Justice, who was not Jewish but a worshiper of God. So he was God fearing who used to be going to the synagogue, who says, "Hey, Paul, you can use my house as a gathering place for you to share the gospel. And by the way, my house is right next door. You don't have to travel far."

Now, Paul is still staying with Aquila and Priscilla. But do you see God's maybe humor in this? Right? Paul gets kicked out of the synagogue and God says, "That's okay. We'll make the house next door a church." And I don't think it's to get back at the Jews. I think it's a matter of God saying, "I am going to try to woo you anyway I can so that you are always close by. So that you may hear the gospel and maybe on your way to the synagogue, you go, 'You know what? I think I've got to stop next door and I've got to pay attention.'" God is constantly working in us to hear his bidding. His drawing us to him.

And the other person who joins is Crispus, the synagogue leader. Now imagine that, right? Paul comes in, and he tells all these people in the synagogue about Christ, who has now saved everybody and has risen from the dead. And the leader of the synagogue understands and believes and joined Paul. This would create great fury among those who didn't believe.

So Paul is left there and he is preaching next door. But he knows there's an uprising that's happening. He can see it coming.

So he's got Aquila and Priscilla, who are keeping him company. Who is blessing him with a place to stay. Who had gifted him with a place to do work until the gift from the Philippi came. He's got new people like Justice saying, "Hey, you can preach in my house." But yet, as we read in **1 Corinthians 2:3**, Paul says, "**3** I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling."

There's got to be a point where Paul, as he has been on this journey, has got to be saying, "Lord, I don't know how much longer I can take this. I was in Philippi. And there, I was put in prison. I was chased out of Thessalonica. Berea was good but the people from Thessalonica came and chased me out again. If I think back to my earlier journeys in Lystra and Iconium where I was almost stoned to death." You've got to imagine Paul going, "Lord, I don't know if I can take much more. Here I am in Corinth. Same story. I'm giving your word, Lord. I'm doing what you've asked. But I'm getting chased out again. I'm getting abused. This is beginning to wear me down." And it's possible that even Paul is beginning to fear for his life again, as he sees this uprising occur again.

But then in **Acts 18:9**, we have this beautiful piece, which in some ways is reflective of places that we've read before. It says to him in this vision, "**9** Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent." First words are, "Don't be afraid."

Have you ever noticed that when you get this nudge to talk to your neighbor about God or when you get this nudge to talk to someone about a truth in the gospel, the first thing that comes up is fear. "What if it's not received well? What if they get mad at me and don't talk to me anymore?" This concept of fear is so easily crept up into us. But God said to Paul, "Paul, don't be afraid. Keep speaking. Do not be silent." Do we need to hear that as well? Do we need to hear Christ saying to us, "Don't be afraid. Keep speaking the truth. Do not be silent when truth is not accepted. Do not be silent when you see truth being abused. Keep speaking. Stand your ground because you're standing on the rock of Christ."

And how can we do that? That's in **Acts:18:10**, "**10** For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." We need to let that sink in. When we are doing life and we become afraid to either speak or when we are doing life and we don't think that we can go on because we're weary and tired, remember the words here where Jesus says to Paul, "I am with you."

And you might say, "Well, that's great. He's talking to Paul. I mean, of course. He's with Paul. What about me?" But do you remember what Jesus said just before he ascended into heaven in **Matthew 28:20**? He said, "**20** I am with you always, to the end of the age." Christ promises to be with us. He dwells with us. He dwells within us. And so as you do life, you can see how Christ is there with you. Sometimes we're like, "Lord, I don't see you." I'm sure Paul had that thought a lot of times where he's doing his thing and he's like, "Okay. God told me to preach here and then there's an uprising."

I mean, I can imagine for myself if all of a sudden, during the middle of one of my sermons, everybody started yelling at me to get off the stage and I'm like, "Oh, Lord. Are you sure you want me to do this?" That's what Paul faced. And Paul here is being reminded of what Jesus says to him, "Do not be afraid. Keep speaking. Don't keep silent. Remember, I am with you." And then it gives this added little piece to Paul. It says in **Acts 18:10**, "**10** ... no one is going to attack and harm you... "

I'm sure those were great words for Paul. It's like, "Well, it's about time. I've been attacked and harmed enough. Nice to know it ain't gonna happen again." But did you notice the word 'and' in there? I sometimes wonder if God's saying, "Don't think you won't be attacked. There will either be spiritual warfare or there will be other people who will verbally attack you." But Jesus is promising Paul that he won't be harmed in this case. That doesn't mean it's going to be easy. It doesn't mean the Christian life is like, "Well, we've got nothing to worry about." There will still be people who oppose us. But Jesus says, "I'm with you."

And then he adds this in **Acts 18:10**, "**10** ,, because I have many people in this city." Because I have many people in this city. When Paul came to Corinth, there were very few who accepted him at the beginning. There were some, That's not many. But God sees much beyond where we are today. God knows the number of people within Corinth. But God also knows the number of people in Peterborough who are waiting to hear the message. Or in a space in which God is still working within them to hear what God can only proclaim through the Holy Spirit. And they too, will believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

And so when God says to Paul, "Paul, there are many in this city who will believe. Those many in the city are not happening just like Pentecost was. "Like boom, one occasion and everybody joined." No, this is a daily grind. This is a long term ministry - and it says that Paul was there for a year and a half. It's the longest Paul has been in any place so far. Mostly because he's been chased out of the other places, but he stayed there for a year and a half and did ministry and saw the growth of the church continue on.

And then Luke gives us this great little piece in which it shows how God protected Paul. In **Acts 18:12**, it talks about Gallio, who was proconsul of Achaia. Which is kind of like the governor of that region. A bunch of Jews came to him and said in **Acts 18:13**, "**13** "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

I love **Acts 18:14-15**, "**14** Just as Paul was about to speak (I've got a defense. I know what Gallio said to them.), Gallio said to them, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. **15** But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things."

Two things to know. Paul didn't do anything illegal. Paul understood the civil laws of the nation and he obeyed them. It kind of gives us a thing to think about as well, as we live within the nation. Do we obey the laws of the nation? We don't cause an uprising that way. But it is in the name of God.

And so Gallio says, "Gentlemen, you might have an issue with this but I've got nothing to stand on. I can't charge him with anything." So Galileo defends Paul even before Paul has a chance to defend himself. And sometimes we see Christ working that way within society. Those things just kind of happen and we know that God is providing for his people. But then there's an interesting twist to this where he says, "... it involves questions about words and names and your own law." As if it doesn't really matter. There's no substance there.

But let us never think that the name of Christ and the truth of Christ is insignificant to all of life. Gallio just brushed it aside, as much of the world does and says, "This issue of Jesus is not a big deal." But it is a big deal. In fact, if we go back to the beginning, in **Acts 18:2**, where it says that Aquila was recently coming from Italy because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. It is believed that the Jews were told to leave Rome because of riots over the name Chrestus, which is a variation of the name Christos, which is Greek for Christ. It is believed that the riots in Rome were over the name of Jesus. If you go back to Pentecost, you can remember how people from all over were there. And some of those people at Pentecost went back to Rome and they brought Jesus with them. It created such a stir that there was a riot over there. And Claudia said, "We can't have this anymore. All of you, out." The name of Jesus is powerful. So let's never forget that.

But then an interesting thing happens. After Gallio says, "You can't do anything to Paul because he hasn't done anything wrong," the Jewish leaders are pretty upset and so they go to Sosthenes. Sosthenes is the new leader who was taken over after Crispus of the synagogue, and they beat him up. Kind of like, "How come you didn't stand up for us?" And they beat him up. But notice Gallio's response. He doesn't do anything. Here's a civil crime and Gallio does nothing.

And sometimes I think to myself, "I don't get that one, Lord. Here you've got Gallio who is saying, 'In civil justice, this is what needs to be done. And yet, we'll let you handle justice your own way. I'm not going to deal with it.'" And how do we respond to that? How do we look at the world and go, "There are areas in which civil justice is being done well, but there are areas in which justice is underlying and dealt with in the back alleys." And how do we say to the world, "There is a God who rules over everything. Justice is under God's justice and needs to be dealt that way."

So Paul has been in Corinth and Paul at this time, it says, "He stayed there for a while and then he left." And just as he leaves, it says something really interesting in the end of **Acts 18:18**. He's taken Priscilla and Aquila with them. And then it says, "**18** Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off... "



We might think, "Well, Paul's been on a journey. It's about time for a haircut." But it is believed to be much deeper than that. In Numbers 6, it talks about a person who makes a vow before the Lord. A vow of consecration to give their life to service for the Lord. And those vows are given for a certain amount of time where the person will say, "I am going to designate the next year to be a full service to God. And to do that, I'm going to restrain myself from certain things."

For example, the fruit of the vine. I will not have any wine in the next year. It's something that we sometimes do for Lent, right? We say, "In the next 40 days, I'm going to do something to focus on the coming of Christ." And a Nazirite was even much more serious than that. It would be like, "I've got to have a specific lifestyle to dedicate myself to God for an amount of time." And one of the things of a Nazirite was that, "I will not cut my hair for the time of the vow. And when the time of the vow is completed, I will cut it and I will offer it to God in a ceremony at the temple in Jerusalem." So that is the vow of a Nazirite.

Paul comes out of that history. Paul comes out of a history in which it's really important to say, "I'm going to give some external objects to my vows. Not just for me to keep it but also for other people to know. I am dedicating my life to the Lord. And it is likely that at the end of his time in Ephesus just before he leaves, he says, "I have dedicated my life and my time of the vow is finished." So he cuts his hair and he will bring it with him to Jerusalem for that ceremony. This idea of setting yourself apart for God in the early church was done through a monastic lifestyle in which they would say, "We are going to pick up these following practices of prayer. Of fasting. Of Sabbath observance. We are going to stay in a way in which it becomes obvious that we are dedicating ourselves to God."

During the time of the Reformation, they're like, "We need to get rid of all this stuff. And we're just going to do this." So a lot of those practices were put aside. Just like people say, "Well, Paul is no longer a Jew so he shouldn't be a Nazirite anymore." These practices were not bad in itself. In fact, there's a lot of health to these things in the aspects of prayer, fasting, and practicing Sabbath.

So we are reminded here that when we look back at where we come from - not just ourselves but at the church as a whole - are there things in our past which we should actually hang on to? That doesn't mean we're going to make everybody do it. Paul didn't say in every church that he went to, "Oh, by the way. You have to be a Nazirite for a year." But for some people, it's a way of saying, "Here is something which is good. It's something that I'm going to practice to help me in my relationship with God."

So Paul leaves and he stops at Ephesus for just a little bit. In Ephesus. Paul has got to be thinking, "Why didn't I come here first?" Because in Ephesus, they welcomed him and they begged him to stay. They wanted him to stay. And Paul is thinking, "Uggg, finally I get to a place where they want me and now I've got to go to Jerusalem." But Paul says, "I'll be back if it is God's will."

We often use that phrase, "If it is God's will, I will do such and such." There's truth to that. But we should also understand, "Why is that true?" It's not a fatalistic piece of, "Well, you know, if God wills it, it'll happen." No, it's true because Paul is seeking the face of God and Paul is saying to the people in emphasis, "I would love to come back to you and I will come back to you, unless God wills it that I need to go someplace else." Or, "God wills it that something happens between now and that time that I'm unable to come back." To say, "If it's in God's will," is not some fatalistic thing of saying, "Well, whatever happens, happens." No. To say, "It's in God's will," implies that you are seeking God's will. That's where it's at. If you say, "I hope to come to you if it's God's will," that is a place where you're saying, "I'm deep in prayer, seeking God's face. If it's God's will, then I want to do it. I want to be in that place where I am doing God's will."

So Paul says to the people of Ephesus, "I am seeking God's face." And as we can see by Paul's journeys, he has been led by God everywhere he has gone. And there are times when he was stopped and the door was closed. And Paul's like, "I guess I'm not supposed to go there." So when he says to the people of Ephesus, "I'm following God. I would love to come back here and if God leads me back here, I will be. But you need to know. I'm following God's will." That is the most important thing. It's the most important thing because he understands that when he follows God's will, he is living in tune with what Christ is calling him to do. And based on Acts 18:9, Paul says, "If I'm following God's will, I do not need to be afraid. I do not need to keep silent. I can keep speaking because I know that Jesus is with me and that there are many people in the city."

I'd like to invite the musicians to come on up. And we're going to look at this in, "How do we live out that place?" Right? If we think about God being with us, that his companionship is always there, that should bring us great comfort. And we should remember Acts 18:9, as Christ saying to us, "Do not be afraid. Keep speaking. Do not be silent. For I am with you. You will not be attacked and harmed." Which doesn't mean we won't have attacks. But, "Remember, I am with you. And there are many people in this city who need to hear of me, Jesus as the Messiah."

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You that You are with us. We thank You, Lord, that You do not abandon us. Lord, we pray that You will give us courage to speak when we need to speak, to speak your truth to those that we need to speak it to. Lord, we pray that we may also be able to hear Your truth, and Lord, as Paul said, "If it is Your will." Lord, help us to seek You. That we may know Your will and that we may not think that this is some fatalistic aspect, but that we may be part of Your working within creation and within the world. Lord, we ask that You will use us to reach the people of this city, in this country, and this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.