

Sermon – May 22, 2022 – Easter 6

Acts 16:9-15

⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. ¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

John 14:23-29

²³Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

This morning I am going to talk to you about Lydia.

She was one of the women who gathered on the Sabbath at the place of prayer. It was by the river, outside the city gate of Philippi. Her name was Lydia, a merchant who dealt in purple cloth. She was an outsider. She was not from the city of Philippi, but from another city called Thyatira, a place noted for its trading of the luxurious purple cloth.

She was not Jewish, but like others, she was attracted to their high ethical teachings. She was seeking. She wasn't afraid to worship with a minority; for these women praying by the river must have been a minority. They didn't even have the minimum 10 men required to form a synagogue. And so they gathered outside the city walls in a quiet spot by the river to worship God. And Lydia was a worshiper of God so she joined them.

I don't know why, but I love to imagine how Lydia looked. I think of her as olive-skinned, with raven black hair; long thick hair, tied up and shining in the sun. I think of her as tall, graceful; a lady with a commanding presence, successful in the world of commerce. There was something else about Lydia though. It was something deep that reflected in her dark eyes, for she was a worshiper of God. Here are a few images – artists' imaginings

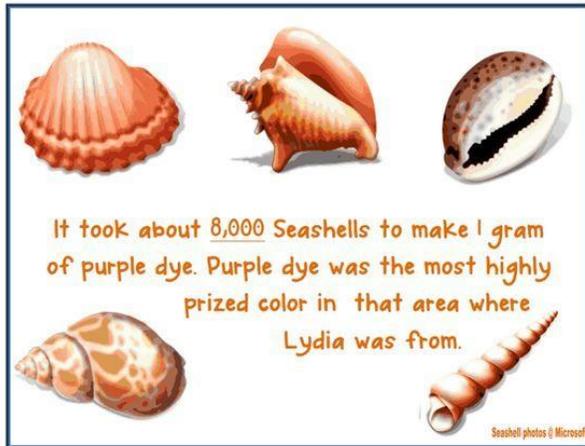


Maybe she didn't wear the purple cloth she sold. That was for the very rich, purple was for royalty.

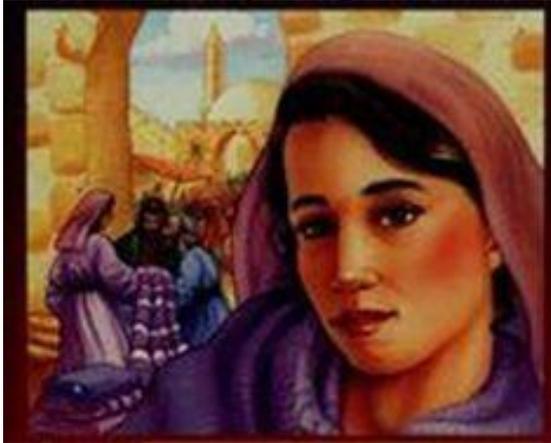


Thousands of snails were needed to make the purple dye. They were carnivorous snails!





But maybe her trade gave her access to other rich cloth, fabrics of crimson, and blue. Maybe like Joseph long before her, she had a garment of many colours.



What stands out about Lydia is her openness to the Spirit.



In John's Gospel this morning, Jesus promises that he will not leave his followers alone; even though he is soon to leave them physically. He promises that the Holy Spirit will come to them. This Spirit, will be their Advocate, and their Comforter. This Spirit will teach them and help them understand all Jesus had said.

The idea of God's love extending to each of us was new. The idea of a Spirit working *within* each person was new to the Hebrew people. They thought of God being present in the inner sanctum, in the great temple at Jerusalem. They knew God also spoke to prophets like Daniel and to the great leaders like Abraham and Moses. But they didn't know about God's love reaching deeply into the hearts of every one of God's followers.

But this story of Lydia on the riverbank and Paul's arrival in Macedonia is a story filled with the Spirit. To begin with, Paul responds to the spirit through a vision he has during the night. In this vision, a man of Macedonia pleads with him to come and help them. Paul responds to this vision and he goes to Macedonia.

Then, **Lydia**, a gentile, responds to this Spirit.

First, the **Spirit** leads Lydia to the place of prayer by the river bank. She is not of the Jewish faith, so to go is unusual, but something draws her, she loves something in their scriptures and their prayers and so she goes. Then Paul arrives. He's a stranger in town. He and his companions sit down with the women and Paul tells them about a man called Jesus; a man who healed, a man who told them of God's love and to love one another, a man who was loved by some and hated by others. The ones who

hated Jesus were powerful and they plotted against him. They plotted to have him arrested and put to death; and they were successful. He was hung on a cross; put to death like one of the worst criminals. But Paul told them that on the third day, when they went to the tomb, the stone had been rolled away and Jesus was gone. It was astounding. It was unbelievable, but Jesus had risen from the dead. He had appeared to many after this. Sometimes they didn't recognize him because his risen body was somehow different and yet somehow familiar.

Lydia took all this in. She listened eagerly. The Spirit was working within her, working to open the eyes of her heart if you translate literally. Deeply within, something clicked. Lydia felt Paul spoke the truth. She believed his story was God's message. Lydia had lots of reasons not to believe Paul. He was a stranger in town. He spoke of things which had happened far way and of people she didn't know ...and yet, somehow the spirit worked within her, making her receptive and she listened eagerly. His words she received like water on parched land. She drank them in, they satisfied her thirst like nothing else she'd ever tasted and she said Yes! I believe it!

So taken was Lydia that she was baptized then and there in the cool waters of the river.

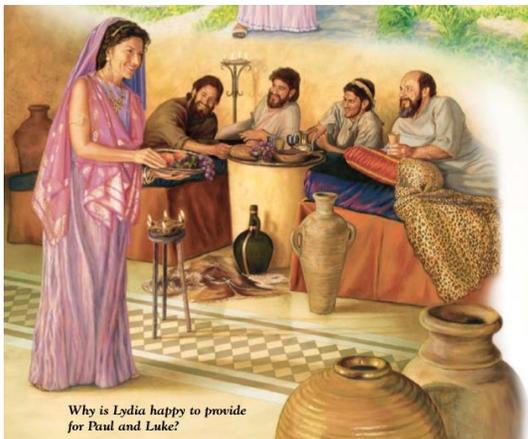


Shrine where Lydia was baptized by Paul.



Dipped into the waters, she died to her old life and rose to her new life in Christ Jesus. Her household members, who were all there with her, were baptized as well, every one going down into the river waters. The spirit was moving and the place of prayer by the riverbank had never seen such happenings.

Finally, Lydia, newly baptized was brimful of the Spirit. She knew what she must do. She invited Paul and his companions to stay with her in her home. Paul was doubtful, but Lydia urged them...she insisted.



And so was born the church at Philippi. This church grew and was a source of great joy to Paul over the years, maybe because it was borne of the Spirit from the beginning. But the church began as a house church in the household of Lydia. Lydia was called to make a home for Paul and for the church.

Our Lord said that the Spirit makes a home with us. Our prayer has only to be that we are open to the Spirit.

What do we learn from Lydia? The Orthodox Churches have given her the title of “Equal to the Apostles,” which signifies her importance and level of holiness. We might ask ourselves where the Holy Spirit is inviting us right now, just as it did Lydia. Where is the riverbank in our lives? Is there a place, maybe an unlikely place, where we are drawn to pray and to hear God’s word? What form of hospitality is the Spirit asking from us? Hospitality is important. Maybe there is someone who needs us to reach out; an invitation to our home, or an invitation to talk, or an invitation to walk.

God loves us – and God’s Spirit is active right now, today, just as it was moving, acting on Paul and Lydia.

Let us be open to receive this mystery, the Spirit, this marvel borne out of God’s deep love for us! Amen.

R's comment: - Lydia is one of the perfect illustrations of what the gospel of Christ does: she was seeking, she was disadvantaged in some ways, not a Jew, not content to be a gentile, a woman, rich. (As I say in some ways disadvantaged) and so open to hear of love and reconciliation.

[King Solomon](#) was reported to have to have brought artisans from Tyre to provide purple fabrics to decorate the [Temple of Jerusalem](#).^[18] [Gospel manuscripts](#) were written in gold lettering on [parchment](#) that was colored Tyrian purple.