

*EPISTLE READING: Acts 16:9-15

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A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, A Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days and on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyratira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. " And he prevailed upon us.

GOSPEL READING: John 14:23-29

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Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him. "He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me. "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you "But the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. "You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. "Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. "I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here. This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

“Open Heart, Open Home”

*It’s a wonderful little story, and it almost did not happen... that meeting of the businesswoman named Lydia and the missionaries, Paul, Silas and Timothy! It is a wonderful little story, and it almost did not happen.

*Just prior to the beginning of the text in Acts 16, Paul had been directed by God in a vision to take his companions not south or west into Asia or north into Bythinia, but to Macedonia (Modern day Greece). It was a vision of a Macedonian man pleading to come help them. *So they travelled across the sea. They took a great journey to the Roman colony, to the leading city in the district, to Philippi. However, there, when they went “down to the river to pray”, when they went outside the gate, they met not a man but a woman, among a group of women. They met a woman named Lydia, from the area that they’d just left, from Thyratira!

*We’re not told a lot about Lydia, but what we’re told is that she was a “worshiper of God”. This means she was not yet converted to the Jewish faith, a Gentile, but a seeker, one who was listening to “the stranger knocking at the door of her heart”. We’re told also that she was “a dealer in purple cloth,” a wealthy businessperson accustomed to doing her work with the elite class of Philippi, people who were allowed to wear the color purple. Moreover, she was head of her own household, no small feat in the very patriarchal Roman Empire.

*Now, the story goes that Paul shared the good news with the women, and Lydia listened. And the “*Lord opened her heart to believe*” (repeat)”. It becomes clear at this point that this “chance” encounter by the river may not so “chance” after all. In fact, the reader begins to wonder if Paul’s vision was for the very purpose of this providential convergence of human faithfulness and divine Spirit, “as fully human and fully divine as the incarnation, itself,” says Ronald Cole-Turner.¹ Paul did his part, and Lydia hers, but God seems to have been guiding the whole thing.

*Regardless, Lydia’s faith then became active. She was baptized along with her whole household, and she OPENED HER HOME. She was welcomed by the Lord in her heart, and

¹ Ronald Cole-Turner. “*Theological Perspective: Acts 16:9-16*” In: David Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor, eds, *Feasting on the Word Yr C Vol 2* (Louisville: WJKP; 2009),476.

she “prevailed upon” Paul and his companions to stay with her and to accept HOSPITALITY in her home. (*pause*) Quite some little story. It is widely accepted, and not at all hard to imagine, that the very successfully Church of Phillipi began by meeting in Lydia’s home!

*You know, Christian Hospitality plays no small role in the realm of biblical ethics. It has always been understood as an attribute of God, and a sign of the relationship between God and the covenant people. The offering of the kind of hospitality that Lydia offered was considered a virtue of God’s people. In the ancient world, it was focused on providing directly for the needs of the desperate...of the alien and the stranger in the land, primarily because these people lacked membership in the community, be it tribe, city-state, or nation, or of the traveler/sojourner who would be in grave danger on their own otherwise, or of widows, orphans, and the poor. It included: welcoming people into one’s home for food, lodging and protection, permitting them to harvest the corners of one’s fields, clothing them, and inviting to religious celebrations. The communal meal, when offered, was an important gesture of fellowship and unity. In fact, the hospitable act of offering a communal meal possessed great symbolic significance. In the ancient world, to share food with someone was to share life. Consider for instance, God's meal with the elders of Israel (Ex 24), Jesus' meals with tax collectors and sinners (Lk 11; 15; 19), the Lord's Supper (Mk 14), Peter's meal with Gentiles (Acts 10), and others.

*While we live in a different time and place, much of what hospitality means for us is still the same. So, let’s consider a few questions together TODAY. Questions of Hospitality... like:

1. *What characteristics should a host who offers hospitality have? Maybe... ***Being Open Willing....*Empathetic, Compassionate...*Vulnerable, Courageous...*Generous...*Self-less...** (*Entertaining is all about saying, “This is mine”; Hospitality is all about saying, “What’s mine is yours”*) ***Servant Heart.** We’re talking godly behavior here. In the OT, Lot and his family were set apart to be saved for his godly behavior; Angels were searching for one righteous man, one who would welcome the stranger, as did Abraham. In the NT, Jesus, God incarnate, said that he was the ONE who came to serve and not be served! In fact, he washed his disciples’ feet when he told them this, and then he said, “*Now that I, your LORD, have*

washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (Jn 13: 14-15).

*Yes, the host need have a self-less, servant heart as Christ ... THE HOST NEED HAVE A SERVANT HEART, AS CHRIST. Lydia certainly did. Our text says, "*And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be FAITHFUL TO THE LORD, come into my house and stay.'*" Lydia had the servant heart as Christ.

And then the text says, "*And she prevailed upon us.*" Do you know where the only other place in the NT is that the same Greek words "prevail upon" are used? *They are in the story of walk to Emmaus! In that story there are the two disciples, who on Easter evening were on a journey to the city of Emmaus, and they encountered a stranger along the way, who was the risen Lord. But at the time they did not know it. They didn't know it until later when it was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. As they walked, this stranger explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning the recent happenings, and they "prevailed upon him" to stay with them for that night. Like Lydia, they became as Christ when they had a servant heart and extended hospitality to him...to whom?...when they welcomed Christ!

Oooh. There's something. *When our hearts are open to welcoming the OTHER, we are symbolically welcoming the Divine! In the OT (Genesis, Judges), there are the stories of entertaining God as guest (i.e. angels unaware), and in the NT, Jesus comes not only as a stranger into a world that did not recognize or receive him, but he quite literally identified himself with the sinner, the lost, the needy and outcast. Many, many places in Scripture is this point made, but most especially in Mt 25, when Jesus says that "*The King will say to those on his right that, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*" When our hearts are open to welcoming the OTHER, we are symbolically welcoming God. So, both are true...The host need have a servant heart as Christ and the host need see Christ in the Other whom we welcome.

Let's consider another hospitality question:

***2. What happens to the Kingdom when hospitality is offered? Hmmm...maybe *It grows! (more people are brought to Christ)... *Social and cultural barriers begin to crumble**

...*Goods are shared....*people are lifted up (hospital)...*Relationships are built

(Loneliness/Isolation decreases)....*Justice gets done— Later in the text we learn that as Paul and Silas were preaching, they were being followed by a mentally disturbed slave girl. She was well known in the area as one who told fortunes and read palms. Paul performed an exorcism on her, and for this he and Silas ended up beaten and thrown in jail. The charge brought against them was “disturbing the peace”. It was brought against them by her owners. (A sequence of providential events then occurred and ultimately Paul and Silas were freed and return to Lydia’s home). But it is important to note that there is mention that Paul’s anger when he performed the exorcism was not directed against the spirits, but against the injustice of the owners who were making a profit off of the girl’s disability. *Walter Brueggemann says this, “*The vision of God for the future is not a vision of accumulation and monopoly so that those who have the most when they die, win. This vision of God’s future is not about angels who have gone to heaven floating around in the sky with their loved ones. The vision, rather, is about God’s kingdom coming on earth as it already is in heaven. God’s rules where the practices of justice and mercy and kindness and peace-ableness are every day the order of the day. It is a vision of the world as a peaceable neighborliness in which no one is under threat, no one is at risk, no one is in danger, because all are safe, all are valued, all are honored, all are cared for.*”² (pause) It’s been said that, “*Christian hospitality is not just a good idea -- it's a matter of life and death.*”³ What happens to the kingdom when hospitality is offered? Justice is done.

*Brothers and sisters, as we leave today, pondering this amazing little story that “almost did not happen”, it would be wise to consider 3 final hospitality questions as “take aways”. * Jesus’ Holy Spirit is the providential agent that works in and through the circumstances of our world to bring opportunities for hospitality to us. So, first we need ask, *3. “***Are we listening? Are we listening for the knock on the door?*** And also, as Jesus was present in Paul, he is in all those we need welcome, in the least of these, in the Other. So, we need ask and keep asking *4. “***Did***

² Walter Brueggeman fr “Inscribing the Text”. Quoted in: Dana Ferguson. “*Is it Either-Or?*” www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2007/051307.html. (accessed 5-31).

³ Henry G. Brinton, *The Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 66-67.

we see Christ in our guest?” And finally, as Jesus was present in Lydia, opening her heart to serve, he is present in you and I, in all givers of hospitality. He is working in us and through us to bring about the wondrous vision of God’s kingdom on earth! So, we need ask and keep asking *5. *“Did they see Christ in us?”*

**And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. “*

To God be the glory through Jesus Christ, Amen and Amen.