



“I Love Lydia”
Preaching Text: Acts 16:9-15
5 May 2013: 6th Sunday of Easter
FUMC, Arlington, Texas

Hear the lesson from the Revised Common Lectionary for the 6th Sunday of
Easter from Acts 16:9-15:

9 During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 When 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.

11 We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, 12 and 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. 13 On 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.

14 A 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. 15 When 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 (Acts 16:9-15).

Lydia, Luke tells us, is the first European Christian convert, and toward her conversion, four things merged and we will speak concisely about these. First, there was the function of providence; second, the workings of Lydia; third, the role of Paul; and last, the work of the Holy Spirit.

First, I would suggest that providence is a theological or philosophical name we give to the entire structure of God’s being in the world—not only as creator, but as an energy that is similar to how gravity holds everything together. Colossians 1:17 reminds us: “He [Jesus] himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” The concept of providence helps human beings feel as if God supports all created life. In other words, we do not live in a random and cold universe, but in one ruled by a divine and benevolent order we call God.

Second, Lydia is a Gentile woman and no doubt attracted to Judaism by its



moral canons and guidance. Lydia, Luke tells us, is a God-worshiper and for that reason is receptive to Paul's message. Because Lydia is from Thyatira, also mentioned in Revelation 2 and a province Asia Minor, she must come to Philippi to meet Paul. She is a business woman, selling luxury fabrics to the elite—as they commonly wore purple cloth. Paul baptizes Lydia and her household and they become the first European converts to Christianity.

Lydia's conversion reminds us that the gospel is not just for the poor, but for all. Her discipline of worship—as Zan Holmes might say “Just showing up”—made possible her chance meeting with Paul. She kept the Sabbath by going to the place of prayer/worship. Her stanch Sabbath work paid off in her new link to the church's greatest evangelist—and her conversion to God in Christ.

Third, Paul too had a role. Paul also sought a place to worship. Often the apostles attended city synagogues, but on this day—for whatever reason—they “went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer.” There Paul conversed with the women he found. He did not stand up and preach to them as Paul might have in large cities like Ephesus or Corinth. Instead, Paul engaged the women in conversation.

Whatever Paul said it aimed straight at Lydia's heart as well as to the hearts of those with her. So effective was this first meeting between these women and Paul that following their baptism, Lydia did something almost unheard of in the ancient first century Jewish/Christian world. Lydia invited Paul home to eat and stay. Luke tells us 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.” Paul and his associates hesitate receiving her hospitality, no doubt out of conventional modesty, but Lydia insists and they accept.

Providence, Lydia, and Paul have done their part, but the perhaps greatest *tour de force* in this story is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit holds the key. Providence



brings Paul and Lydia together. Lydia arrives there because she is a Sabbath-keeper, and loves worship. Paul arrives not only because he worships as is his custom, but also because he loves to win souls and convert lost sheep. But it would have been a poor gathering for Lydia and Paul if God's Holy Spirit had not been present. So we read of Lydia: "The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul." It is wonderful that God can open a human heart; for the locksmith who made the lock knows well which key will fit it.

We might say that providence is the objective form of life in Christ—we might even liken it to the hardware of a computer system. While we might liken the Holy Spirit to the content supplied by software for a computer. Sometime back the Associated Press carried this dispatch: "Glasgow, Ky.—Leslie Puckett, after struggling to start his car, lifted the hood and discovered that someone had stolen the motor."

As relevant as providence, Lydia, and Paul are—it is the spirit that endures as the engine that drives the Christian life. Ask Lydia sometime about her introduction to Jesus by Paul and how random it seemed at the time. Amen.