

## Sixth Sunday of Easter – Mother’s Day

### Text: Acts 16:9 - 15 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup>During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” <sup>10</sup>After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. <sup>11</sup>From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. <sup>12</sup>From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. <sup>13</sup>On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup>One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. <sup>15</sup>When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.



### Theme: God Opened Her Heart, and She Opened Her Home

The Bible is full of examples of women who opened their homes to God’s people. Rebekah opened her home to Jacob and eventually became his wife. Pharaoh’s daughter opened her home to Moses when He was a baby. Rahab took the spies in her home in Jericho, and she and her family were saved when the city was destroyed. The widow of Zarephath took the prophet Elijah into her home, and her jars of flour and oil never ran out. In the New Testament Mary and Martha invited Jesus into their home, and their brother was raised. In the book of Acts and in Paul’s greetings to many people at the end of his letters we also hear of the hospitality that many women gave to the apostles and other people.

Lydia was also such a woman. She opened her home to the apostles because the Lord opened her heart to believe in Jesus as her Savior.

#### I. God opened her heart to His word.

The circumstances of this story are very interesting. This was Paul’s second missionary journey. He and Silas were traveling through Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey. They had visited the congregations that they founded on their first journey. Now they wanted to turn northeast, but somehow the Holy Spirit would not let them go that way. They were puzzled at where God was leading them. God kept them from going every direction, that they wanted to go, until they were finally backed up against the sea at Troas. They were wondering what this meant when it took a vision from God to tell them to cross the sea and go to Greece. This was probably somewhat difficult for Paul. He was from Asia Minor. He knew that area. He had done all of his ministry in that area. Now God was calling him to move from Asia and preach the Gospel in Europe for the first time. It was also at this point that Luke joined the mission team. The first city that they came to was Philippi, which had the status of a Roman Colony. Many of its residents were retired Roman soldiers. There were very few Jews in the city. The next story shows that Jews were not respected at all in Philippi.

Paul and Silas were brought before the judge who was told, *“These men are Jews, and are advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”* (16:20-21) Paul was very much out of character in this place. He was in a strange country. Generally he would begin preaching in the synagogue, but there was no synagogue in this city. There were only a few women who gathered to pray at the river.

That is where Lydia comes into the picture. It says that she was from the city of Thyatira, which is in Asia Minor, Paul’s homeland. Paul had a connection to someone in this strange place. It also says that she was a dealer in purple cloth. Thyatira was famous for their purple cloth. It was expensive. She was probably wealthy. It also says that she was a “worshiper of God.” This designated a Gentile believer in God who did not become a Jew. They worshiped God, but they did not hold to all the Jewish laws and rituals. From these few verses, we know a lot about Lydia. She was a wealthy Gentile woman from Asia Minor, who worshiped Israel’s God.

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke came to her and shared the Gospel that Jesus Christ is her Savior. Her heart was opened to receive that message, and she and her whole family were baptized. Lydia became the first Christian in Europe. Paul didn’t know where God was leading him at first, but He led Paul right to this woman who came to know Jesus Christ as her Savior.

God has also worked everything so that you would know Jesus as your Savior. How did you come to faith in Jesus? It was not because you sought God. It was because He sought you. It was not because you opened your heart to the Gospel. It was because God opened your heart to the Gospel. Maybe God blessed you with Christian parents who brought you to the baptismal font when you were a small child. Then they made sure that you learned about Jesus as they taught you to pray, read Bible stories to you, and brought you to the services of God’s house. Many of us have our mothers to thank for making sure that we learned about Jesus as our Savior. For others of us, it was someone who shared the Gospel with us later in life. Things worked out that at just the right time when we needed to hear it, someone told us of God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. It is no coincidence that any of us are here today. God brought us to this place to remind us that Jesus Christ gave His life on the cross for the forgiveness of all of our sins.

When we believe that message, it is not our work. It is the working of the Holy Spirit. It was God who opened Lydia’s heart to Paul’s message. It is the Holy Spirit who has opened all of our hearts to trust that Jesus gave His life for me. He is my Savior. It is a gift of God that He opens our hearts to believe the Gospel.

II. Then like many people in the Bible Lydia opened her home to the apostles.

She persuaded them strongly to stay. You can imagine the conversation. She probably asked Paul where they were staying. Then she told them that they could stay at her home. They might have said “thank you,” but they were okay, but she wouldn’t take “no” for an answer. They were going to stay at her home.

The Bible doesn’t tell us any more about Lydia, but it tells us a lot about the Philippian congregation. That small group of woman quickly grew into a thriving congregation. When Paul was in prison in Rome many years later, they would send their pastor Epaphroditus to Paul to encourage him. He

responded with the letter to the Philippians to thank them. You can tell how fond that Paul was of this congregation and how much joy that they gave to Him from this letter. There was a special relationship between Paul and this congregation, and it all began with a stay at Lydia's home.

On this Mother's Day, we also give thanks for the hospitality that many Christian women have shown to us. When I was a student in Germany, there was a family that was very hospitable to the American exchange students on the weekends and holidays, and they gained a son-in-law because of it. Throughout my time as a student in Europe, I remember a good meal from many Christian women, who had pity on these poor students. I even remember one Yugoslavian woman on a train from Greece to Germany, who gave some of her chicken and home-made goat cheese to two students who were not smart enough to bring food on a 36 hour train ride. I also think of a family that took me in for a 6 week vicarage, and how one night when I didn't get home until very late from the airport, there was a large plate of food waiting on the steps for me. As all of us look back, we can remember the hospitality that Christian women have shown to each of us.

Where would any of us be without the hospitality of these Christian women? For instance, it is never convenient to serve the meals after funerals, but it is always appreciated very much by the families. The hospitality of these Christian women has been a gift of God to us. The greatest gift, that God gave to us in this regard, was our mothers. They took us home. They fed us as babies right up until our teenage years, and every time that we have come home after that. Some of us even have trouble during the holidays because both mothers want us to come for dinner. Some of you might even end up eating two Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. Think of some of those hospitable women that God has blessed you with. Remember to thank them, and thank God for them. They are truly a wonderful gift of God to us personally, and even to His entire church.

On this Mother's Day, we thank God that He has opened our hearts to faith in Christ as He opened Lydia's heart. But we also thank him for the hospitality of many Christian woman, who have also opened their homes to God's people and shared the love of Christ with us with their generous hospitality in Christ.

Amen.

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