

Sharing the Love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Acts 16.9-15, John 14.23-29

We talk a lot about sharing the word, both the message from Jesus and the message about Jesus. We like to hear testimonies from people who have heard the word and come to faith. And sometimes we hear a bit more about how the word is then taken to a new place or a new person. Let's shine a light on the sharing of the word that we hear about in our reading from Acts.

It involves whole groups of people, but the 2 people named are Paul and Lydia. We know a fair bit about Paul. From being an opponent of Jesus and a persecutor of the followers of Jesus, Paul became someone who eagerly spread the good news of Jesus. He helped those who heard it to build communities of faith, and he continued to keep in touch with those communities, encouraging them and helping them in many ways. His letters to those communities still help many today.

What do we know about Lydia? Well, nothing outside of this chapter in the Book of Acts, but there is quite a lot here. Let's give her a context first. She lives in Philippi, in Macedonia. The city of Philippi lies in what is today north-eastern Greece. In Paul's time, Macedonia was a Roman province, and Philippi was a Roman colony, as were some other cities in Macedonia. Philippi was on a major trade route between Europe and Asia, and it was a busy place with quite a mix of people, including Lydia.

Here's a question for you. Lydia has something in common with these people. Call it out when you think you have it: Florence Nightingale, Orlando Bloom, Chelsea Clinton, Denver Pyle, Olympia Dukakis, Tennessee Williams, Paris Hilton, America Ferrera, Winona Ryder. [Answers?]

Lydia's name is a place name and can simply mean "from Lydia". These other people are not necessarily from the places they are named for, although some of them are.

What can you tell me about Lydia as a person? [Answers?]

She was

- A woman
- A worshipper of God
- Part of a women's prayer group

- A listener, open to new ideas
- From Thyatira in the province of Lydia in modern-day western Turkey
- A dealer in purple cloth
- Had a large house – plenty of rooms for guests and gatherings
- Had her own household – she and all her household were baptised

Want to explore more possibilities about Lydia? You might like to look at an article by Peter Foxwell. At the time of writing in 2020, he was the lead pastor of the Cornerstone Church of Clyde, MI and a student in the Doctor of Education in Christian Leadership program at Liberty University. <https://www.regent.edu/journal/journal-of-biblical-perspectives-in-leadership/lydia-in-the-bible/>

So what happened when Paul met Lydia? Firstly, this happened in a prayer group of women. Paul commonly visited synagogues, but there was no synagogue in Philippi, possibly because there was not the requisite number of Jewish men to establish a synagogue. However, Paul approached the prayer group of women.

Lydia is described as a worshipper of God, so she practised some form of Jewish worship, although she may or may not have been a Jewish convert. She did, however, become a follower of Jesus. After listening to Paul and his companions, the Lord opened Lydia's heart and she was baptised, "she and her household". Paul and his companions continued to stay at her house. (Acts 16.15)

Chapter 16 continues after our reading with Paul's experiences and imprisonment in Philippi. In verse 40, we hear "After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left." Lydia now appears to be hosting the beginnings of a Christian congregation.

We know that Paul and his companions spoke to Lydia from the heart about Jesus. There is much that they could have said. If you were with Paul and you had the chance to tell Lydia and the other women about Jesus, what is one thing that you would definitely include? [Answers ...] Yes, there is so much that could be said.

Let's turn to what we might find in today's very Trinitarian Gospel reading.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples about going to the Father and reassuring them that they will not be left alone. This passage doesn't just speak of the existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but of some of the dynamics of that relationship.

The word that they have heard from Jesus is the word of the Father, so keeping that word, following and obeying, is to walk in the love of the Father as well as in the love of the Son. It is the same word and the same love, and this word and message are not just once-given. The Holy Spirit will come and continue to teach and remind the disciples of the Father's word as given by the Son.

There is more. Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." This is more than the peace of the world. It is not simply a cessation of hostilities, such as we imagine when we say people have made peace. It is greater than that.

This is the peace of power and presence. This is the peace that passes all understanding. This is the peace that is ever-present and reassuring, even in the presence of sorrow, pain, strife and other kinds of trouble. This is God with us in all circumstances. This is never being alone and abandoned in our grief or sorrow. We will certainly know those things, but our God is with us and for us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

This is part of the powerful message that Paul took to Philippi, the message that Lydia and the brothers and sisters of that place heard and took to heart. This is the message we hear today, the word that we trust and obey. Can we also take it to heart?

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