

## **Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter 2010**

We find Paul in the reading for today from Acts planning to move his mission to the region of Asia, probably because of all of the growth in mission generated around Ephesus. But the Spirit of Jesus has other plans. He and his companions are gently guided northward to Troas. Paul is now led out of familiar territory into what we might call uncharted waters. While Paul perceived that God was closing the door to mission in one area, God was also opening the door to mission in another. While Paul was ready, are we ready to meet the challenges of mission today? What opportunities for mission present themselves to us?

We note that Luke sees the genuineness of Lydia's conversion reflected in her hospitality. Perhaps that is a clue for us today when there is a deep spiritual hunger and a longing for community. As the mission unfolds in Macedonia, Paul and Silas are imprisoned and then released. And, it is to Lydia's home that they go after their release and it is in her home that they establish their base of operations. Other Christians gather there in what has become a house church. Can you imagine doing the same in this community or in your neighborhood?

Paul is now definitely making inroads in the Gentile world. Lydia is the only person mentioned by name in this narrative and by the time Paul writes his letter to the Philippians, there is a strong church community in Philippi committed to Paul and his mission. Have you discerned how the Spirit may be inviting you to do a new thing in this congregation? Rae Hadley and friends have begun a service of Compline (a prayer book service for the end of the day) on Monday evenings. Who might be your likely partners in mission; or as this Gentile woman, Lydia, an unlikely partner for Paul.

As Eric Barreto reminds us, "Lydia is highlighted in three ways. She is a worshipper of God, a native of Thyatira, as well as a purveyor of purple cloth. The first designation identifies her as one of a number of individuals in Luke-Acts with a faithful proclivity towards the God of Israel.... (These are individuals who have inclined themselves to this God though they are not identified as Jews and thus are on the margins of the faith.

Second, the naming of her hometown is an unexpected twist; it is a *foreign woman* who has God open her heart to faith! Finally, her profession as a merchant of purple cloth is perhaps an indication of her social class and powerful status. Thus, the narrative ends with a note of generous hospitality. For Lydia a natural result of her hospitality, the good news is to welcome these strangers into her home.

For Luke, geographical details are not mere window dressings or simple signposts to help the reader keep their place on the map. After all, we see Luke has the heavy hand of the Spirit directing Paul in no uncertain terms. The conversion of Lydia is not explained save to say that *God* opens her heart to receive what Paul was saying.

Unmistakably for Luke, this is the way God plans for the church. We ought to follow God's call to reach across cultural and ethnic boundaries and find opportunities to do God's work in unexpected places. In Acts, this road is marked by the panoply of people toward which the Spirit reaches out—Macedonian, Philippian, Thyatirian, Jewish, and Roman alike. Ought not our missional paths bear the same character?

In the Diocese of Los Angeles, we have many ethnic groups represented. Next Saturday our Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefferts Schori, will consecrate two women as Suffragan Bishops after election and consents from a majority of bishops and standing committees in the dioceses of the Episcopal Church. As Paul was open to the ministry of women like Lydia, so we are called in our time to support these women in their call by the Spirit to lead us in mission.

It is fitting that we remember Lydia of old and Diane and Mary on this Mother's Day. For in many cases, it is the faith of our mothers and grandmothers that has been passed to us. Today we give thanks for those who "mother" the Spirit in each of us.

In 1858 Anna Reeves Jarvis was moved by the Spirit to organize Mothers' Works Days in West Virginia to improve sanitation. During the Civil war she organized women to care for the wounded on both sides. In 1870 Julia Ward Howe, author of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic, issued a Mother's Day Proclamation. As Julia and others organized an annual Mother's Day for Peace, they were committed to abolishing war.

They wanted women to march in the streets because they believed that women bore a special responsibility as actual or potential mothers to care for the casualties of society. These women played a leading role in the abolitionist movement and conducted successful campaigns against lynching and consumer fraud. During the next 30 years, Americans celebrated Mother's Day for Peace on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. During these last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they sought to improve working conditions for women, protection for children, public health services and assistance to the poor.

When Congress declared the second Sunday in May to be Mother's Day in 1913, our consumer society had been so influenced by politicians and business interests to change the celebration's tone and date. From celebrating activism in support of the nation and communities, the emphasis changed to celebrating the personal sacrifices made by mothers. Mother's Day is now a billion dollar industry focused on the individual and family.

Ruth Rosen, a professor at UC Davis, argues that while some may think it insulting to alter our current way of celebrating Mother's Day, public activism does not preclude expressions of love and gratitude for our mothers and grandmothers, and great grandmothers. Let us remember also those nineteenth century women who dared to dream of a day that honored women's civil activism beyond the family. We should do no less on this Mother's Day.