

King of Glory Lutheran Church
August 27/28, 2022
Summer Series – Lydia – Acts 16:13-15
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2 Corinthians 5:16-21

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Acts 16:13-15

¹³On 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. ¹⁴A 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. ¹⁵When 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.

Today we conclude our preaching series “People of Faith – God’s Story” with the story of Lydia. What we know of Lydia comes to us from three verses from the book of Acts. Although she is only briefly mentioned in the New Testament, Lydia is well known in our Christian tradition.

We know Lydia’s story because it was recorded as part of the story of Paul and Silas and Timothy and all those who shared the gospel and gathered people together for worship and service in the communities that they visited.

You might have noticed that in our reading today from Acts 16:13-15 includes several “we” statements. *“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.”*

Occasionally in the book of Acts the narrator includes himself or herself in the story. We don’t know who this person was but Biblical scholars often attribute this “we” to be the writer of Acts who was also the writer of the gospel of Luke.

The gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are really meant to be read or heard together. The gospel of Luke tells the story of Jesus’ ministry, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection. The book of Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the apostles as they shared the gospel and the first Christians became the church.

In Acts 16 Paul continues his travels visiting Derbe and Lystra and then on to Phrygia and Galatia and Troas. The author of Acts writes, *“From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.” Acts 16:11-12*

So Paul is on the move going from place to place as the Holy Spirit directs him. And when he and the people he is traveling with are in Philippi they seek out a worshiping community. In places where there wasn’t a synagogue, Jews and Gentiles interested in the Jewish faith would gather together to observe the sabbath wherever they could.

Paul and his crew go to the river where they have heard people are praying and they find a group of women there. Paul shares with them the good news of Jesus.

Lydia is the only woman we know by name who Paul meets on this day. She is called a worshiper of God. And we are told that she is from Thyatira and is a

business woman. From the details that she is a dealer of purple cloth and able to command a household it is possible that she was a prominent business woman.

Lydia listens as Paul shares the good news of Jesus. We don't know exactly what Paul said but we can imagine that Paul shared with everyone there at the river how Jesus had changed his life. Jesus brought good news of God's love and forgiveness for all people. Not only for the wealthy or the healthy. Not only for the perfect or the popular. Not only for men or priests or Jews. Jesus came to earth for all people. So that all kinds of people everywhere would know that God is with us and for us forever.

Lydia wants to be a part of this good news and so she asks to be baptized and then she has her entire household baptized. And we know that this wasn't something that happened on this one day and then Lydia went back to her life as if everything was the same. Lydia was changed. She opened up her home to Paul. She shared what she had with her community of faith. She became a leader of the church.

As I spent time learning about Lydia this past week I discovered something I hadn't considered before. We know that the early church grew by the power of the Holy Spirit and by people sharing their experience of new life in Christ with their families, friends and neighbors. Lydia generously shared her home and wealth, but she also shared her story of faith. She was a preacher and teacher, learning from Paul and then leading her community of faith.ⁱ

Lydia was an evangelist. She shared the good news of Jesus and invited people to be a part of the Christian community. Lydia's life was changed by Jesus and she couldn't keep the good news to herself. The old had passed away and everything was new.

Paul wrote many letters to the churches he helped start all over the world. In one of his letters to the church in Corinth Paul said, "*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*"

Paul knew this in his own life. He had persecuted Christians believing his understanding of God was the only way to know God until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul became a new creation. He changed his ways from believing that God was only for some people to a new way of preaching and teaching that God was for all people.

Lydia became a new creation when she heard the good news. Her life was changed by the good news of God's grace and love for all people. And she shared the good news with people all around her.

Lydia and Paul were ambassadors for Christ, they were evangelists, they were preachers, they were the church. We remember their stories still today because they shared the good news of Jesus. They shared the good news so that your life and my life would be changed and made new.

The good news is that Jesus came to us so that we would know that we are a new creation in Him. No matter who we are. No matter what we have done. No matter what. Every single day we are a new creation and the old has passed away. God's love gives us new life and hope every day. And that is news that we need to hear again and again. It is news that all people need to hear and experience.

You might not know this but God's plan for sharing the good news of Jesus is you and me! You are an ambassador for Christ. You are an evangelist. Just like Lydia, just like Paul.

Because we live thousands of years after Jesus and Paul and Lydia we sometimes forget how the church began. We expect that the church we know is the church that has always been and will always be. But God's story and the story of people of faith for all of time is that God is always doing a new thing. And that is just as true for the church as it is for you and me.

What is God about in the church today? How has God equipped you and me to be evangelists and share the good news? We are not alone in this ministry. We have the gift of all the evangelists who have come before us showing us a new path forward. Lydia used all the gifts she was given to be the church and share the good news. So today, let's learn from her story and her example and be ambassadors for Christ in our own way and in our own time.

Amen.

ⁱ Working Preacher, *Commentary on Acts 16:9-15*, May 1, 2016 by Mitzi J. Smith on www.workingpreacher.org.