

Acts 16:6-15 ⁶They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ ¹⁰When 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. ¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and 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. 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 worshipper 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.

Acts 16:6-15

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“Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Doors”

Rev. Amy Terhune

Douglas J. Deuel tells about “...a family that recently bought a new puppy. They got a six-week-old Chinese shar-pei. Those are the dogs with all of the wrinkles. They named her Jiggles, because when she runs her wrinkles jiggle like Jell-O.

“The breeder had told this family that shar-peis won't bark unless they learn that behavior from another dog. If they hear a dog barking, they will imitate that behavior.

“The first day home with the puppy, the parents found their five-year-old son on the floor of their front room barking at Jiggles. The little boy's father told him, "Don't bark at her. You'll teach her to bark, and we don't want that."

“The father then went upstairs. He came back a little later and discovered his son on the floor with Jiggles and now he was mooing at her. The dad is now worried that he will end up with the only Chinese shar-pei that moos.

“Communication is something we long for at our deepest level. It is how we make connection. When we seek that type of connection with God, and for whatever reason, we just don't feel it, that can be frustrating. God rarely speaks through burning bushes or booming voices in the sky anymore. As a result, we can become confused about God's message for us or the direction God wants our lives to take. [5 ¶s from “A Call To Community” by Douglas J. Deuel, www.Sermons.com]

A few years back, the United Methodist Church started an advertising campaign with the slogan: Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Doors. I might have those in the wrong order, but same difference. I think they eventually abandoned it because people took it a little too literally, and most United Methodist Churches I know do, in fact, lock their doors when not in the building. But it's too bad, because that is who the church is supposed to be. In fact, they may well have pulled that slogan straight from this passage in Acts. Listen again to what it says about Lydia. She listened eagerly, which means her mind was open to receive a message. It says that ‘the Lord opened her heart.’ Opened her heart! And then, she offered ‘come and stay at my home’. She put her new-found faith into practice and flung wide the doors to her home. Lydia's response jumped out at me because it touches my spirit. It challenges me to live into my identity as a follower of Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of our graduates this morning, it occurs to me that those with open minds, open hearts, open doors are the ones best poised to encounter creativity, collaboration, and a calling to live into. And it occurred to me that although we're God's children, if we responded to God as Lydia did, and truly opened our minds and hearts to God without reservation or conditions, invited him into our homes and our lives, we'd have a revolution on our hands that would spread love to the furthest corners of the globe!

SHE OPENING HER MIND

Lucy, of the Peanuts comic strip, tells Charlie Brown that she has to read a book but doesn't want to. Would he please read it to her? "Read it yourself," he says. She replies that reading takes effort and she hates anything that takes effort. Charlie wisely says that listening takes effort, too. But, Lucy retorts, she wasn't going to listen. [from Hurley, Virgil, *Speaker's Sourcebook of New Illustrations*, (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing) 2000, c1995.]

How often we are like Lucy. We know we should be learning—delving into scripture, studying issues of mission and justice. But it's too much effort. Others want it taught—to everyone else. But to want it taught while we sit and never really open our minds to the teaching – this is a tragedy! What good is the Gospel to us if we don't let it touch us, change us, challenge us. Lydia listened eagerly. She didn't just hear—in one ear and out the other—she listened. She let it in. And it impacted her, it changed her life.

GOD OPENED HER HEART

Let's switch our attention for just a moment to Paul. That poor man. His ministry is at a point where nothing seems clear. In every ministry situation, there are always setbacks as well as successes. The fact that the greatest evangelist the world has ever known faced trials and setbacks should give us hope—at least we're not alone when it feels like an uphill battle. He tries to go to Asia to preach the gospel, but the logistics just will not fall into place. Then he tries to go to Bithynia, but that plan falls apart, too. He interprets it as the Spirit blocking him, which he accepts, but how frustrated he must have been. Then he has a dream of a man calling him to Macedonia. Not really the place he had in mind. But at least he's been given some direction, so he goes. But when he gets there, something again doesn't work out, because scripture tells us that Paul went to worship outside the gate by the river.

Let me provide a bit of background, here: After the Babylonians captured Israel more than 500 years before the birth of Christ, they shipped the Jewish elders, educated leaders, and nobility off to every corner of their empire. 70 years later, when Babylon fell and the Jews were permitted to return to Israel, many chose not to return. After all, they had settled in those cities and made lives for themselves. The generation that had come from Israel had died away, and these gentile cities were the only home known to the children and grandchildren. As a result, 550 years later, when Paul is traveling the Roman Empire to share the Gospel, he finds Jews and synagogues in nearly every city in the empire. That's always where he starts—and then he goes to the gentiles afterwards. Philippi was the capital city of the region. Surely there was a Synagogue? Why wasn't Paul there? The text reports he had been there several days, so it's not like he didn't have time to find it. That question has plagued commentators for centuries. The truth is, we simply don't know! Perhaps there weren't ten Jewish men left in the City of Philippi to have a quorum for opening worship in the Synagogue. More likely, they wouldn't receive him. Perhaps the Spirit that had led Paul to Macedonia led him to that place of prayer. But whatever the reason, Paul went to preach to these devout, praying women, and the Holy Spirit opened Lydia's heart and she believed.

"So Paul, who seemed this time to be on a mission that was going nowhere, meets the woman who will be the lynchpin of the church in Philippi. And while other churches give him nothing but grief, the Philippians are a constant source of support for him, financial as well as spiritual. His letter to them is one of the warmest of the epistles. He's founded a church in what seemed an unlikely place, and it becomes one of his greatest success stories." [from "Lydia, the seller of purple" by Mike Truman, www.sermoncentral.com.] What made the difference? I have no doubt it has something to do with the

fact that Lydia's heart was open. She saw the needs, she felt the burden for those lost in the darkness as she had been.

In January of 2010 (it's hard to believe it's been that long ago already) NBC had a big kerfuffle over its late night line up. Conan O'Brien had been the host of the Tonight Show for a mere 7 months when he was fired, and they brought Lay Leno back. On his farewell show, he offered words that touch me even all these years later. He said, "All I ask is one thing, and I'm asking this particularly of young people that watch: Please do not be cynical. I hate cynicism. For the record, it's my least favorite quality -- it doesn't lead anywhere. Nobody in life gets exactly what they thought they were going to get. But if you work really hard and you're kind, amazing things will happen." [from <http://www.cnn.com/2010/SHOWBIZ/TV/02/16/conan.obrien.advice/index.html>.] In other words, keep your heart open to the world. Don't let it make you jaded, even when things don't go as you'd open; even when things aren't fair. Lydia's heart was open to the world. She wanted to do good.

SHE OPENED HER DOORS

Lydia was the first European convert to Christianity. She was a businesswoman—a seller of purple cloth. "Purple cloth was made from a substance found in minute quantities in shellfish. It took thousands of crustaceans to make a yard or two of purple cloth. So it was very expensive, worth its weight in silver it was said. It was a statement of status and wealth, the Gucci handbag or the Rolex watch of Roman times." [from "Lydia, the seller of purple" by Mike Truman, www.sermoncentral.com.] That puts us in a position to deduce quite a lot. Lydia was a wealthy woman. She probably brushed shoulders with the rich and powerful players of the time. No mention is made of a husband. She is clearly the head of her household. Most commentators seem to think she was a widow, but we don't know that for sure. Was she a Jew or gentile? The text tells us she was a worshipper of God, but her name—Lydia—is Greek, which seems to suggest that she was a Gentile woman who was attracted to the worship of the Jews' God. There's a lot we don't know about Lydia and the circumstances that led to her conversion. But we do know this: Lydia did more open her mind and heart. She responded. She acted. She opened her doors.

As you probably know, the early church during Paul's ministry and for about 300 more years, faced much persecution. There were no church buildings. In most places, even the Jews in the Synagogues eventually banished Christians from their midst. So churches met in homes. They often relied on a patron—someone who would allow worshippers to gather there, someone who would provide a place for food and resources to be collected and members of the community to be cared for, and quite often, someone who led worship for those who gathered. Lydia became one of those patrons.

Lydia opened the doors to her home. She opened doors for Paul and Silas and Timothy (and undoubtedly others) by providing funds to further their journey, and by introducing them to others who could do the same. Through her business, she very likely connected them to associates. It is entirely possible that she laid her reputation, her business, her life on the line when she received Paul and his company. If we read on in Acts 16, Paul and Silas are jailed when accused of disturbing the city and advocating things that are not legal. They had their enemies. Lydia welcomed them anyway. And when they were released from prison, she took them in again. Along with Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, Phoebe and Tabitha, Lydia was a woman empowered by Paul and by God to serve the church. And in being open, she became a leader, a conduit for God's work, a model for those who follow. My prayer for our graduates today, and for all us, is that we, too, would be open. Don't let the world make you jaded and cynical. Whether we be male or female, old or young, rich or poor, gay or straight, liberal or conservative or anything else, each of us is God's child: let's open our ears, our minds, our hearts. Then let's open our doors, our wallets, our schedules. And then let's open ourselves – to the Spirits prompting, to risks worth taking, to love born of God. When we do, we really will change the world. May it be so. Amen.