

GOD'S ELECT RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL

Acts 16:11-15

TEXT: *From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day 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. 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. 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. 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.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Today's Gospel Lesson records that Jesus told his disciples that he would make them "fishers of men." Acts is full of accounts of how the Holy Spirit used these apostles and others to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify God's elect.

One before us is Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth. It's not clear from Scripture whether Lydia produced the purple dye to make purple cloth, or if she was a saleswoman in dealing with purple cloth, but what is clear is that Lydia was involved with a lucrative business and was probably a very wealthy woman. This "purple cloth" was made from a purple dye that came from a substance secreted by a type of tiny snail that was tediously collected by squeezing that substance from their tiny bodies. These tiny were found in the eastern areas of the Mediterranean Sea. It is said that it takes some 12,000 snails to produce one and a half grams of dye. This made what became known as Tyrian Purple dye very expensive. This is what Lydia was dealing with in her business.

Being led by the Holy Spirit Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke were traveling throughout the area as Luke writes: *From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day 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. 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. 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.* They meet Lydia. The Bible says that Lydia was "a worshiper of God," but Lydia did not know Jesus. However, Lydia was one of God's Elect, so the Bible says: *The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.* This is one of the signs that someone is one of God's Elect: GOD'S ELECT RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL.

Lydia worshipped God but she didn't know Jesus. Many people sincerely believe that it is enough to be a worshiper of God whether this worship involves Jesus or not. Sadly, they are tragically wrong. Sadly, they are tragically deceived. Before Jesus was born into this world his presence in this world was manifest among the people the Lord had chosen to be his own through the promise that the Christ would be that Descendant of Eve who would come through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He called himself, The Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Sadly, so many of those ancient Jews who, like Lydia, worshiped God yet did not believe in the Lord as their Savior God. That was proven when the Jewish religious leaders actually believed that they were serving God by crucifying Jesus. Even Paul thought he was serving God when before his conversion, he was hunting down Christians.

How ironic it was that after his conversion, Paul was boldly proclaiming Jesus throughout the world! So many worshiped God in one way or another, but Jesus himself clearly declared: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* In 14 Lydia worshipped God but didn't know Jesus. Without Jesus, Lydia would go to hell.

Was Lydia lucky to have been down by the river that day when Paul and his men came through? Many people have a problem with this because it is the arrogance and self-righteousness of our Old Adam that thinks that God would not damn people to hell who have not had the chance to hear the Gospel. "But pastor, how can you say that God will damn someone who hasn't had the chance to hear? It's not their fault! And if we don't make mission work and evangelism the top priority in all that we do with our energy, time and money, then aren't we to blame for their damnation? How can this be?"

“Lucky Lydia?” No. Lydia loved by God and chosen from eternity to be as Scripture says: *...holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-* Eph 1 What proof of her election to salvation is given to Lydia? Scripture says: *And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ...* Eph 1 To Lydia, the mystery that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself had come to her through the message of Jesus.

That wasn't luck. That was God's grace. You see, God knows where his children are even before they know where God is. So, when Paul preached his sermon about Jesus, the Bible says: *The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*

Lydia was one of the Lord's elect so she responded to the Gospel. This was God's sign to her just as it is in the Church today. God's elect will respond to the Gospel, the saving power of God the Holy Spirit who **calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.**

Paul was traveling with a young pastor named Timothy. It was in his second letter that Paul wrote to Timothy: *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God- having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.* 2 Tm 3 We often think of the grossest of these sins of the last days when we think of unbelievers. But the most dangerous sin is to tragically think that we are Christian when we aren't. Where would we put Lydia in this list of last day sinning of which Paul writes? Here was a woman who was meeting with fellow Jews, down by the river, to worship God. She appears to be a wealthy, but respectable business woman. Without Jesus, however, Lydia was one who had “a form of godliness” but without the power. By God's grace alone, Scripture tells us that *The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.* She then was baptized, and saw to it that all the members of her household were baptized. She didn't stop there. Luke tells us: *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.*

About those who think that their form of godliness without Jesus will get them to heaven, Paul warns: *Have nothing to do with them.* 2 Tm 3 Lydia, however, was called by the Holy Spirit, so Paul and the rest were gladly persuaded by this Christian woman to enjoy her hospitality and support. She supported the fellowship and the ministry of the Word, just as you and I so generously support the same old message of Christ crucified, dead, buried and raised to life for our justification. No matter how godly the world may think itself to be, they are God's enemies without Jesus.

That is the work and purpose of this congregation. It is to preach and teach the Gospel of forgiveness and peace through Jesus. To baptize for the forgiveness of sins and to keep our children mindful of their baptism all their days. That means bringing our baptized children to church with us. It's not ours to worry about mission work since the Lord knows where the “Lydias” of his kingdom are throughout the world even today. He will open their hearts according to his good will and pleasure. But since he has opened your heart to know Jesus you know why you feel like Lydia who said: *If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.* And you will enjoy the PRIVILEGE of doing “mission work” that is, supporting the ministry of the Gospel both at home and abroad.

God's elect respond to the Gospel. That's why Lydia did, and why God's Word and Sacrament is still among us today! Amen.