

2016 5 1 c 2016 readings Easter 6

Acts 16:9-15 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 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.

John 14:23-29 ²³Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

²⁸You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

Here, in 14:24 this image is given a new twist: we are to be the dwelling places of God and Jesus!

So here we go again. Another story in the book of Acts about a woman. She's named here, and that's a step in the right direction. Lydia. She is considered the first European convert as our story takes place in Philippi. Lydia will not be here with us today as Dorcas was a few weeks ago, but both women are here in spirit. You see, they were two of the many people who, after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, heard the story and needed to hear the story and responded by giving over whatever they could to the followers of The Way. But then everyone needs to hear the story. Jesus came to teach love, and acceptance and forgiveness and to bring peace to the people and all nations.

Luke tells us of his first encounter with Lydia with these words, 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."

(Anna sings)
As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the starry crown?
Good Lord show me the way!

O sisters let's go down
Let's go down, come on down
O sisters let's go down
Down in the river to pray

We know only a little bit about Lydia. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us".. Lydia was a purveyor of purple cloth. This means she sold her

fabric to royalty. She sold her cloth to wealthy people. So Lydia quite possibly lived very comfortably.

Owning a business requires a person to accept quite a bit of responsibility. I like to think that Lydia was a powerful woman; a woman with a certain amount of influence.

And it seems she was such a person. Lydia and her entire household were so impressed upon hearing about Jesus that they were all immediately baptized.

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the robe & crown?
Good Lord show me the way

O brothers let's go down
Let's go down, come on down
Come on brothers, let's go down
Down in the river to pray

What is even more impressive here is that Lydia immediately felt comfortable enough to offer hospitality to the disciples who were strangers only moments before. We talk a lot about the importance of hospitality. During this very early time in the church, house churches were the norm. There were no cathedrals. There were no church buildings anywhere. There were only people, like Lydia, who asked if they could provide a space. "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Lydia provides for us a perfect example of Christian love. We are constantly reminded to offer an extravagant welcome. Lydia feels at peace with her new friends and she invites them in.

One of the very greatest gifts we have to offer is our peace, a peace that surpasses all understanding. In a world that seems so frightening, where we are sometimes even fed false information to keep us fearful, we, as believers of Jesus Christ carry with us the peace of Jesus Christ. We embody peace.

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O fathers let's go down
Down in the river to pray

I spoke with someone this week who described to me the moment she first started really believing in Jesus. She said it was as though a hole she had always had in her heart was filled with her love for him. This happens. And when it happens, we do in a sense, become the church. We embody Christ. We embody that peace. We each have so much to offer to other people who have so much less than we do, whether we share our money, or time, or sweat,, or our listening ear. Part of our Strategic Plan, Phase three is to reach out into the community in some ways. And to go out into the community to share. Perhaps we will discern new ways to share the peace that we receive through our LOVE for Jesus Christ.

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the robe and crown?
Good Lord show me the way

O mothers let's go down

Come on down, don't you wanna go down?
Come on mothers, let's go down
Down in the river to pray.

Lydia offered an invitation . We too can offer invitations, not just to come and see but also to find the peace in Jesus Christ that is offered to us completely free of charge. We find peace here in this church building and in one another. We also find peace when we pray or when we are prayed for. This peace is an enormous gift that we have to offer.

As we celebrate communion today, we will have a tangible opportunity to once again share the peace that Jesus Christ brings into our hearts by inviting us to share this meal with him. And every time we celebrate this meal, every time we sit down awhile to pray, we can pray that others will experience an indescribable peace as they come to know Jesus Christ.

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the starry crown?
Good Lord show me the way

O sinners, let's go down
Let's go down, come on down
O sinners, let's go down
Down in the river to pray

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the robe and crown?
Good Lord show me the way

Closing prayer--

Psalm 67

¹May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah

²that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.

³Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

⁴Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

⁵Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

⁶The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.

⁷May God continue to bless us; Amen

(Alana-go to communion table)

"Down To The River To Pray"

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And who shall wear the starry crown?
Good Lord show me the way!
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Let's go down, come on down
O sisters let's go down
Down in the river to pray
As I went down in the river to pray
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And who shall wear the robe & crown?
Good Lord show me the way
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Come on brothers, let's go down
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