

Can you believe it's been two weeks already since Mother's Day? It seems like time goes by faster when the weather is nice. Next thing you know it will be Father's Day! In fact, I see that Unhinged Pizza is already advertising their upcoming Father's Day Buffet special. But, this morning, I would like to return briefly to the subject of mothers as our Bible reading from Acts 16 leads us in that direction.

I've heard it said that being a mother is one of the toughest jobs in the whole world. I would certainly agree. Being a mother entails so much hard work, diligence, patience, endurance, wisdom, and most of all love. But I would contend that being a **Christian** Mother is one of, if not **the**, toughest job in the world. That's because on top of all the hard work of raising children, it's even harder to raise children in such a way that they will grow up strong in the faith of the Lord Jesus in a world that is becoming more and more hostile to Him and His followers.

This morning we'll take a look at a woman named Lydia, an early convert to Christianity as a role model on how to do the toughest job in the world, raise a family in the faith of God's Son, our loving Savior, Jesus Christ. Although the Bible doesn't mention specifically whether or not Lydia was a mother, she definitely is a model Christian woman and a model Christian, period. She humbly received the word of God, and she gladly served the kingdom of God. No one can do any better, whether you're a mother or not, whether you're a woman or not.

What we do know for sure about this woman, Lydia is that she was from Thyatira. That's a city which is in the western part of modern-day Turkey. Thyatira is where Lydia was from but when today's reading takes place, she is living in the city of Philippi, and that's in northern Greece.

It was actually quite an amazing event that brought the apostle Paul and his fellow workers in Christ to Philippi as we read about it in today's reading. Paul had come to Philippi after he received a vision of a man urging him to cross the Aegean Sea to spread the gospel in Greece. Now, if the vision led Paul to hope that at the moment he landed in Greece, people would flock to him and practically mob him to learn about Jesus,

he was greatly mistaken. As far as we know Paul didn't find **anyone** to talk to about Jesus until he reached the city of Philippi. And even then, it was several days before Paul and his companions found a group to preach to. And what a humble group it was. This small company of people didn't meet in a beautiful synagogue in the city center. They met outside of town on the banks of a river for regular prayer. And ironically there wasn't a man in the whole bunch. Remember it had been a man in Paul's vision for Paul to come over there in the first place! Maybe it was the fishing opener or hunting season, who knows?

Lydia, of course, was one of the women who **regularly** gathered for prayer at this spot, (fishing season and hunting season or not). We're told that she was a dealer in (expensive) purple cloth. It's clear that she had built a successful business for herself since later on she was able to house Paul and his companions while they stayed in Philippi. It also seems very clear that Lydia already knew something about the true God **before** Paul came to her. She may have learned about God from the many Jews who lived in her hometown of Thyatira. But even though she knew about God, she still hadn't heard that God's promised Messiah had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This, of course, is what Paul's ministry was all about- telling the Good News of Jesus. So, Paul shared the Gospel with Lydia and she believed.

I'd like to pause here to mention a few things that make Lydia a **model** Christian woman. The first thing that sticks out in my mind is that even though Lydia was a successful businesswoman she made time for regular worship. As busy as she must have been she wasn't too busy to make the weekly trek out to the river to join fellow believers in prayer. As tired as she must have been from the stress of running a business, she didn't reason she deserved to sleep in or have "me time" just this one day of the week. Don't you think it would have been easy for Lydia to say, "Why do I need to go down to the river to pray? I can do that right here in my home whenever I want and save myself time and hassle." No. Lydia understood the importance of getting together with fellow believers. She knew that she needed their encouragement and that she could be an encouragement to them.

Lydia sets an example for anyone who considers herself or himself to be a believer. Although she wouldn't have known this portion of God's Word since it hadn't been written yet, Lydia would have agreed wholeheartedly with the words, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). A model believer doesn't make excuses for why she can't be in worship. She'll make the effort to regularly join fellow believers or at least arrange to have believers regularly come to her with God's Word. It's true; going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than sticking your hand in the freezer makes you an ice cream bar. But if you are an ice cream bar, you better not stay out of the freezer, or you'll melt, or get eaten. Likewise, if you are a true believer, you better not stay away from God's house and His people too long, otherwise your *faith* will melt, or get eaten up by the devil, whom the Bible says, "prowls around like a hungry lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

What else is worth imitating about Lydia? How about the way in which she humbly received the Word of God Paul shared with her? She believed what Paul said about Jesus being the only One in the world who can save us from going to hell because of our sins. She didn't object when Paul must have pointed out her sin as he did with all his other audiences. She didn't protest and claim that she was a good and decent person. Lydia was aware of her sins. Had she been dishonest in her business dealings? Had she entertained impure thoughts about her customers? Did she sit around the office and complain about her hired help? We don't know, but Lydia knew that she needed to be covered in the cleansing blood Jesus shed on the cross. And so do we.

But here's the thing about Lydia's conversion. She couldn't take credit for it. She couldn't go home after meeting Paul and announce to family and friends that she had made the decision to follow Jesus. Luke, who is the author of our text, makes that clear when he writes: "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14b). Thankfully God the Holy Spirit still does today what He did for Lydia. He works through words of the Bible, not dazzling light shows, to create faith. Do

you see why the study of God's Word is so important? It's because that's how God communicates with us. More than that, it's how He enlightens and empowers us. It's how we come to nod our heads, as did Lydia, when we're told: "Jesus died and rose again for you. Heaven is yours!"

Lydia's newfound faith didn't sit on her heart like foam on beer, as Martin Luther used to say. Her faith was active. Lydia went home and told her household about Jesus. And they too were baptized. What we learn from Lydia is that we all have people close to us with whom we can share Jesus. Sure, we need to be concerned about whether or not people on the other side of the world hear about Jesus but let's not forget about those people who sit with us at the kitchen table. Speak openly about your faith and the things that you learn from God's Word here. God can and will work through that witness as He worked through the witness of Lydia.

But Lydia wasn't content just to tell her *family* about Jesus. She wanted to support the work Paul and his companions were doing. So, she invited them to stay at her house. She did more than invite. She insisted they stay! Have you ever listened to a missionary's presentation on his work in a far-flung country and think: "Boy, I could never do that?" But you do participate in that work whenever you support mission work. Jesus even once said that whoever welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet, that is, because he shares God's Word with others, will receive a prophet's reward (Matthew 10:41).

Paul eventually moved on from Philippi to spread God's Word to other cities. As far as we know Lydia didn't sell her business and follow the apostle. It seems that she stayed on in Philippi and kept doing what God had given her gifts to do: sell purple cloth. If she did this to the best of her ability and to God's glory, then she was fulfilling God's will for her.

And so do you, dear women of First Lutheran, not just when you faithfully tell your children about Jesus, work with them on their catechism class homework, or pray for the work here. You also fulfill God's will for you when you put in an honest day's work at the office or in the shop or in the field, or when you fold laundry, or when you check in on your friends and do this to God's glory.

No, the sinful world which is hostile to Christ doesn't get what makes a model woman. It's not about being able to multitask 24/7 while dressing like a model in Vogue Magazine or a star on a Tik-Tok video. It's about humbly receiving God's Word and gladly serving God's kingdom, just as Lydia did. By responding to God's saving working in your life you and I can do the same to the glory of God and the building up of His kingdom here on earth! Amen.