

‘Who Persuades You?’

Isaiah 49:8-12; Acts 16:9-15

May 26, 2019

Lydia persuaded Paul and Silas, and the rest of the companions, to stay with her. This is a pretty radical decision for the heavily steeped in tradition, previously Jewish now turned Christian Apostle Paul. Even today, Paul carries a reputation of criticizing the very idea of women’s leadership in teaching or serving in ministry. Does that reputation fit Paul?

The text states that in Paul’s vision, he saw a man. But we learn that as he encountered Lydia, and the other women gathered there, he spoke - even preached - to them. That is not so surprising, as Paul understood the Good News was to be spread to everyone. The new twist though, for some, is that Paul not only considered these women *receivers* of the Good News, but also advocates for, preachers of, and colleagues with other men and women who were known leaders of the church.

Prisca and Aquila, custom of time was to refer only to the husband. Paul not only named them both, but named Prisca first.

Philippines, Paul calls Eudora and Syntyche fellow laborers in the service of the Gospel, laborers involved in public ministry

Romans: Phoebe was a diakonon, clearly an officer, minister

Receive her in the Lord as befits the saints; do whatever she tells you.

Greet Mary, Rufus and his mother, Julia, Nereus and his sister.

So Paul and Timothy sat down on the riverbank, and talked with the women, one of whom was Lydia.

They initially part company as friends, because we learn later in this chapter that after Paul and Silas are released from prison, they return to Lydia’s house to encourage the disciples before they leave.

There is a lot that is left to our imaginations in this passage. What do they talk about? Who are these other women and what happens to them? What we do know is that Lydia’s open heart leads to her extending hospitality to Paul and those accompanying.

Although they meet in Philippi, Lydia is from Thyatira. Since she is living in Philippi, it seems that Lydia is away from a place she once called home, a place with which she is still affiliated. Perhaps this made her particularly attuned to the needs of the group of men traveling declaring the word of the Lord. Lydia is described by the work that she does; she is a dealer in purple cloth. As a business woman, she is both able and willing to support the ministry of Jesus Christ by providing shelter to ministers. She welcomes strangers in a place where she once was a stranger. Clearly, the growth of the church is a team effort, an effort that requires the extension of hospitality and generosity.

It is important to remember that this hospitality and generosity may be found in unexpected places, coming from those who we do not anticipate will extend it. Paul sets sail looking for a man to share the good news with in Macedonia. Instead, he encounters a group of women.

Rather, we have been chosen for a purpose: “You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light.” We have a mission: to proclaim in word and deed the good news of God’s redeeming love in Jesus Christ.

In numerous and profound ways Jesus calls us to be a part of God’s emerging kingdom. The world as we know it is being transformed. Each of us as individuals, yes, but collectively as God’s people we are called to participate in this radical transformation.

Church doesn't exist just so we can practice living together in community. Church doesn't exist so that we can build big buildings and denominational structures. Church doesn't exist to simply meet the needs of religious consumers. No, church exists because through us God is doing something remarkable in the world. Church matters because for whatever mysterious reason—and on some days the wisdom of this choice boggles the mind—*God has chosen us to help change the world.*

Bruce Epperly: Living a Holy Adventure

Many people today are in search of the miraculous. We want to experience faith rather than hear about it. We want the living word of God's presence and not just doctrinal words and ethical rules. We want the Spirit to well up within us as a living reality, not just a story from the past. We want the word to be made flesh and abstractions to take life in concrete actions for God's realm.

Today's readings join vision, spiritual transformation, and healing, and call persons to become everyday mystics and God's healing partners. When we respond to God's visions for us, we claim God's healing touch and bring healing to ourselves and our communities. New healing energies are released, the doors of perception are cleansed, and we experience infinity in finite moments, eternity in the midst of time.

SUMMARY:

1. Be open to surprise.

Acquaint yourself with the whole story and trust what God is trying to say to you through what feels strange and unexpected.

2. Find where you can Accompany and/or Encourage others who may be different from you. God has a bigger plan than what any one of us can envision, Transformation is bigger than our history.

3. Expect a miracle!