

In the name of our risen Lord, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Moms are special people. We can often point to the wonderful things they do for their children, their husbands, their friends. Gifts and cards and flowers attempt to say “Thank you” and “I love you.” We can learn any number of lessons from our moms. Husbands might end up saying “I wish I could be more like my wife when it comes to this particular thing.” Children might think “I know mom loves me because she does this or that for me.” Some might think of it as just another “Hallmark Holiday,” but how nice it is to consider the life and love of a special woman or two in our lives.

In worship today on this Mother’s Day, we look at a very small slice of a particular woman’s life. And there are lessons to be learned from her—lessons in faith. Today in the words of Acts 16, we find **LESSONS FROM LYDIA** and these are the lessons:

1. Go to church!

2. Pay attention!

3. Live your faith!

The Apostle Paul had been travelling around on a missionary journey preaching forgiveness and eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ. He went from city to city on the coast of the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas and to inland cities as well. He had intended to go into a certain area, but God prevented him from doing so, giving him a vision and calling him to go to Macedonia, which was most of modern day Greece. He and his companions landed at Neapolis, which was the port city for the Roman colony of Philippi and then walked the 5 miles to the city.

Philippi was really a Roman military city with a lot of retired soldiers living there. The city sat on the Egnatian Way, the major trade and travel route from Rome to Asia. You can still see the stones of that road which Paul travelled to bring the gospel to the city. Some of you no doubt remember walking on those very stones along with me several years ago. It is an amazing thing to walk on the very road the Apostle walked as he approached the city where he would find women of faith like Lydia.

Lydia was from the city of Thyatira. The people there were famous for their skill in manufacturing and using purple dye. The purple cloth that was made with this dye was very expensive, worth its weight in silver, and used by the wealthy and the royal. Lydia was a trader in this pricey material and she lived and worked now in Philippi.

It has been suggested that maybe those of you who are widows or maybe single moms should identify with Lydia. Then again there is a tradition that said she lived in Philippi with her husband. We don’t know all the details of her life, but it appears that she had servants, children or likely both. But it would be a mistake for us to take as our LESSON FROM LYDIA that she was an independent, wealthy, successful, hardworking woman whom we ought to admire for those qualities. If those things were true, they are admirable, but they do nothing for our faith and they are not the reasons the Lord lets us look in on her life through the pages of Scripture. No, the lessons are far more important—and they have eternal ramifications.

Why did Paul go down to the river, expecting to find Jewish believers? Well, normally he went to the synagogue so that he could explain to people who were awaiting the promised Messiah that the Christ had come and kept God's law just as he was promised to do—that he had given up his perfect life for sin, just as Isaiah had foretold—that he had risen from death, just as Job understood that he would. Paul would go and tell them that Jesus was that Messiah and that they could place their full trust in him. The problem was that there was no synagogue in this Roman town because the Jewish population was so small. When there was no synagogue, the few Jewish believers there would gather on the Sabbath to worship and normally near a river in order to use the water for ceremonial washings. Well, there was such a place there in Philippi and this was one of the places God wanted Paul to go to and preach the gospel.

Paul and his friends shared Jesus with the women who were meeting there for a Jewish service of prayer. Among the small group of women were Jews and at least one Gentile woman who trusted in the one true God. That woman was Lydia. It says, **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.** Lydia was a worshiper of God. The first LESSON FROM LYDIA, we might say, is to GO TO CHURCH!

Can you imagine what life might have been like there in Philippi for this believing woman? You're surrounded by tough-guy warriors—yes, most of them older probably, but these were former centurions and soldiers. They had led hard lives, they sported battle scars, and above all they were loyal to Rome and Caesar whom they worshiped as a god. And there you are, a woman, a non-Roman, and one who worshiped not Caesar, but this Hebrew God—and you weren't even a Jew! Lydia might have appeared a little out-of-sync with her friends, acquaintances and customers. And yet, she had resolve—more than that—she had faith in God. She trusted his promises to send a Savior. She looked forward to his coming. And it was important for her to go to church. Church for her was probably a house or a small shelter there along the river where each week the small family of believers would gather. Not fancy in the least, but a place to be with other believers, to pray and to worship the true God.

I think it's interesting to consider the kind of things that might have gotten in Lydia's way and prevented her from worshiping. She was a minority as far as faith went. She was a transplant from another city in another region. She could have suffered in her business for believing as she did. Perhaps Christians today have some of the same things to worry about, but wouldn't you agree that we sometimes let far less get in the way of our regular worship of God? There's a lesson to be taken from Lydia's example. We see in her the same kind of desire that David had when he said these things in the Psalms: **I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells (Psalm 26:8).** He talked about the **sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God (Psalm 55:14).** And finally, **I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."** (Psalm 122:1)

But how often have we sinned by not worshiping our God? How often have we sinned by not having the same appreciation for worship exhibited by David? How often do we come out of obligation and not out of a desire to be in the presence of God or out of love for God's house or for the sweet fellowship of believers? The Savior that Paul preached to Lydia and the other ladies has worked forgiveness for just these kinds of sins. His love for us encourages us to go to church to worship him, and the example of others—like Lydia—also inspires us. The fellowship of believers...the house of God...being in the presence of God—that happened with a group of women who met down by the river just as it happens in a beautiful church like Grace. It happened for Lydia and it can happen for you and me.

There is a second LESSON FROM LYDIA. That is to PAY ATTENTION when you are at church. It probably happens to you—it happens to all of us from time to time—that you find yourself not paying attention in worship. *“The pastor’s lips are still moving and I guess I can hear that he’s still talking, but what did he just say? How long was I tuned out for? Man, am I tired. What is she wearing?! I wish that kid would stop messing around behind me.”* There’s lots of stuff that can distract. And a lot of it is totally our fault. Our sinful nature, not to mention Satan, doesn’t really care what’s being said by God through the pastor speaking the Word. We or the devil himself, put up roadblocks for God’s Word as our Savior comes to us on a Sunday morning. Since it is common to us all, Lydia could have struggled with the sinful nature as we do. And whenever that would have happened for her either before this day Paul came to Philippi or after, she found forgiveness in Jesus just as we do. But this much we know—and here is the LESSON FROM LYDIA—she paid attention that day. And look what the Lord did for this child of his: **The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.** The Holy Spirit did his work on her heart, convincing her of the truth of the gospel and moving her to respond to the message she heard that day from the guest preacher!

I was reading a “Teaching for Women” website, interested in what it said about Lydia. I found a curious thing there. They talked about Lydia opening her heart, but that’s not what it says, is it? No, here is a testimony to the Spirit’s power in our hearts and lives. He gives us faith to believe; that does not come from us. As we pay attention as his Word is being proclaimed, God can open our hearts to believe the truth of what we’re hearing. He gives us faith to believe and faith to respond to what we hear.

And Lydia responded, didn’t she? Her heart of faith lovingly responded to her Savior. She LIVED HER FAITH. And that is the third LESSON FROM LYDIA. We too can look at her and see what it looks like to LIVE OUR FAITH.

The message of Jesus’ living and dying for us, and his will that all should be baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, impacted her. Love for her Savior moved her to respond in several ways. First and foremost, it was clear that Paul had explained—and the Spirit moved her to understand—the need for baptism to wash away sin and promise eternal life. So what does she do? She has the members of her household baptized. Just like a mom and dad will entrust a baby to the Lord’s care and trust his promises of forgiveness and faith and salvation for that child, Lydia

took the message of baptism home. When she knew the incredible gift that baptism was, she shared it with those closest to her.

I have always enjoyed the way Luke records the last words of our text: **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.** And she persuaded us. Lydia invited, persisted, insisted, that Paul and Silas, Timothy and Luke stay with her. What a kind act! What a blessing for those missionaries of the gospel! Lydia’s home became the base of operations for mission work in Philippi! It became the central office for gospel-spreading in the region!

Just think about the example of faith Lydia sets for us. She hears the truth about Jesus and then she makes sure that those closest to her hear the gospel and are baptized, then by her act of hospitality, ensures that the gospel can be shared throughout the area. Imagine the relief of those men! They knew that Lydia and her household would take care of any number of things for them so that they could preach Christ crucified and risen! It is no great leap in logic to suggest that since she was a merchant in the most expensive cloth in a wealthy city, she was probably doing well financially. Again, it is no great leap to think that she may have done more than just put a roof over the missionaries’ heads. Their proclamation of God’s love in Christ was made possible, in part, because of the way Lydia LIVED HER FAITH.

We probably don’t have to think real hard about how we’ve failed to respond to the good news of salvation in Christ when it comes to supporting the work of the gospel. We’ve pinched our pennies, worrying about ourselves, while gospel work among us is not funded. (We even have some issues with that around here right now.) We’ve not been eager to carry out the spread of the gospel ourselves, and sometimes especially when it comes to our “households”—our immediate or extended families. For those sins we also ask for Jesus to forgive us. And when we know we have that total cleansing of our sins in Jesus’ blood, we get back to the true desire in our hearts to show our love for Christ and his Word by living our faith. We once again look seriously at how we can further the kingdom of God. We find opportunities and we find the dollars it takes to spread the gospel so that many more people might join us around Christ’s throne in heaven one day. Love for our Savior moves us to do those things and we see a nice example of how to do them in this LESSON FROM LYDIA.

On this Mother’s Day when many women are thanked and celebrated for who they are and what they do, thank God for the work he did in Lydia’s life. Thank him for the lessons about faith that we learn through her example. And may Lydia’s example always remind us that no matter how smart or gifted or dedicated any woman might be, there is something more important and you’ll find it in Proverbs 31, which all of us ought to read later today: **A woman who fears the LORD is to be praised (Proverbs 31:30).** Lydia was one of those women, thanks to the God of all grace who loved her and loves each of us as well. May we be renewed by Jesus’ love for us as she was, and may we serve him with our lives just as she did. Amen.