

*Stay With Us*

Acts 16:9-15

May 9, 2010, 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter and Mother's Day

Whitefish UMC

- † If you had to describe only one thing that characterizes your mother, what would it be? A woman named Joan Torello says that her mother is notorious for her lead foot. Joan wasn't surprised to hear that a Georgia state trooper pulled her mother over for speeding as she raced through the state on her way home from Florida.
- † Hoping to get off with a warning, Joan's mother tried to appear shocked when the officer walked up to her car. "I have never been stopped like this before," she said earnestly to the officer. "What do they usually do ma'am," he asked, "shoot the tires out?"
- † Most of us would choose something more significant, I imagine, than having a lead foot when describing an outstanding trait for our mother. Some of us remember our mother's being angry a lot. Judith Viorst once wrote an essay based on interviews she had with children when she asked them "What's a good mother like?"
- † Viorst reports that the children expected their mother to get angry from time to time. "She has to," said Ted, "or she'll faint from holding it in." "But it's best to remember," said Randy, "that when your mother starts to act real weird, you have to look scared and serious. Don't giggle. When mommies are mad, they get madder if you giggle."

- † “My mommy got so mad,” said Megan, “that she yanked the plate off the table and all the mashed potatoes flew into the air.” “And why,” Viorst asked, pretending she’d never heard of such shocking behavior, “why would a mother do a thing like that?”
- † “Well,” said Megan, “she told my older brother Mike—he’s 11—to eat the potatoes on his plate and he said ‘Later.’ And then she told him again to eat the potatoes and Mike said ‘Soon.’ And then she told him he had better eat those potatoes right now and he said ‘In a minute.’ And then she stood up and Mike finally took a bite and told her, ‘How can I eat them? They’re cold!’”
- † It’s not easy being a mom or even having a mom sometimes.
- † We don’t know whether Lydia, the woman named in today’s scripture from the book of Acts, was a mother or not. We are told that Paul and his sidekick Silas, though intending to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to Asia Minor, end up instead on their way to Macedonia, a part of Europe.
- † In a dream, Paul has received an urgent plea from a man of Macedonia to come and help them. Though they have been headed in the opposite direction, they figure that this must be a message from God, maybe because they know that God lots of times takes us in directions we weren’t planning on, to places we may not even want to go.
- † It’s helpful to remember that Macedonia, on the border of what we now know as Europe, had been an important and powerful nation in the ancient world. It was the home of Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia, who went out from there to conquer the known world, traveling to places as far away as Egypt and India and spreading the Greek culture and language far and wide.

- † Perhaps you saw the movie about Alexander the Great with Brad Pitt. If you did, you know there was a lot of bloodshed in those conquests. But Paul, the great evangelist, is just the opposite of Alexander: he is coming TO Macedonia, and he's bringing not war, destruction, and a conquering army, but the wonderfully good news of Jesus Christ, words and deeds not of conquest but of freedom.
- † So it's interesting that the heart of this scripture story is a woman, the very first convert to Christianity in Europe. Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth and woman of some means, has her very own household to bring along when she gets baptized. Let's look at her more closely.
- † First picture Paul and Silas and the rest of the guys arriving in Philippi, a very important city in Macedonia and a Roman colony. Still, there aren't enough Jews in Philippi to build and maintain a synagogue, and they need someone to connect with in their mission. So, they go down to the river, early morning on the Sabbath, where their people are praying. There they encounter some women, and one of them is Lydia, studying to convert to Judaism.
- † She may be a former pagan, a former slave, but the narrator calls her "a worshipper of God." Her heart and mind are open to hear the promises of God and know that they are for her, too, and for her whole household, which may include a husband and children, or may not.
- † She must have passion, energy, and no doubt some skills with preaching (after all, she talks Paul and his companions into accepting her invitation to stay with her—even though she is a Gentile and that would have been a major problem for some people.)
- † She has such passion, that even before chapter sixteen of the book of Acts is over, she 's already gathered a group of sisters and brothers to be church

right along with her, in her own house. She's not only the first Christian convert in Europe, but the Mother of the church in Europe. And she a woman and Gentile at that!

- † And the beauty of this story is how well it illustrates what Paul later writes in his famous passage in his letter to the Galatians, when he quotes the baptismal formula used by the very early, early Christians: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
- † When Paul baptized Lydia that day down by the river, we can just imagine him using those very words as he welcomed a new daughter of the promise. It no longer mattered that she had been a Greek, a woman, a slave—because she was an heir to the promises of God—to the love, mercy, and justice of Jesus.
- † What more fitting reminder for us here today in Whitefish United Methodist Church, where we baptize Susie and welcome new members from many faith histories and many places. And what a fitting way to remember Mother's Day, too, with this story of a mother of our faith.
- † The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all people, and that is something we live out in our congregation really faithfully. Not always easily, but faithfully.
- † Fleming Rutledge tells the story about crossing the street near her parish in New York City. A taxi came roaring around the corner and knocked her to the pavement. A crowd gathered and an ambulance was called, but it took an unusually long time to weave its way to her through the traffic.
- † It was forty minutes until she was put on the gurney, and in the meantime, she lay on the asphalt. She was aware of a lot of people standing around

looking down at her. What she remembers most about that long wait was the great distance between herself on the concrete and the faces high above.

- † In those minutes she says she very much needed someone to get down on the ground with her, to put a coat under her head, to hold her hand and stay down with her until help arrived.
- † Sometimes the church can be a lot like those faces high above a person who is struggling, suffering, and longing for someone to reach down, kneel, and offer a hand of compassion and presence. I am happy to say that that's not true of our church.
- † Lydia, upon receiving the gospel of Jesus and putting on the new life of baptism, didn't simply hoard the joy of the promise for herself. What was her first response? To offer hospitality and to invite others in.
- † Today we celebrate the spirit of Lydia by saying, "Welcome—Come stay with us!" And it's just the beginning. Let us be brave this morning and have high hopes as we imagine in our hearts that we can gather by the river ourselves, by the waters of baptism and the waters of birth as our reminders of new life.
- † And on this Mother's Day, let's remember Lydia, our foremother so long ago, coming from the edges of town and the distant pages of history to remind us of the promises of God for those thirsting for a new beginning and new hope. Come, mothers and fathers, children and grown-ups, daughters and sons—stay with us—
- † Shall WE gather at the river? Amen. Let us sing....

Sources:

Kate Huey, “Weekly Seeds,” <http://www.ucc.org>

King Duncan, “Wide Enough for All,” <http://www.sermons.com>