

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Lydia: lucky find or God-given helper?

Hymn: 68 Lead us heavenly Father

Reading: Acts 16.6-15

Prayers:

Our story turns in a dramatic new direction. The whole story thus far has been centred on what we now call the Middle East and the area of Asia we now call Turkey.

Suddenly, the Spirit of Jesus who for Luke is the guiding power of Paul and the others, forbids them to speak in one place and leads them down to the Troas, on the very edge of Asia.

A mysterious man appears and it's hard to say whether he is a dream-like figure or a real person. His request is: "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

The request is to leave Asia behind and cross over to modern Greece and thus begin a mission to Europe. What we have been listening to is the story of how the Gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed in our part of the world. (We have to beware of saying this was the first time that the Gospel was preached in Europe for we know that a church was established in Rome but we are never told how that came about.)

So who was this Macedonian? Did you notice that during the course of the reading Luke suddenly changes from the third person "they" to the first person "we".

Scholars tell us that this doesn't necessarily mean that Luke was the man from Macedonia. But in my romantic way I like to think that it was at this point that the Greek called Luke urged Paul and his friends to come to his own country and to spread the Gospel.

So they set sail and finally come to Phillipae which is a Roman colony, one of those cities populated initially by retired Roman soldiers and those who traded and produced goods. Here we meet with Lydia who is a prosperous business woman. She manufactures purple cloth, the cloth worn only by the Emperor and those who were in his court.

Paul and his friends speak to Lydia and the women who have gathered down by the river. Lydia responds to the good news of Jesus and what he reveals of the love of God.

After the manner of other stories she is not only baptised herself but her whole household, family and servants are baptised with her and she throws open her home to Paul and those who journeyed with him.

What we find in this story is that powerful sense of both God's guidance of the church and women and men playing their part in shaping the mission of the church.

Certain doors are closed to Paul and his friends and a new door is opened. When they need the help of others Lydia provides a home and a base from which to work.....

In their different ways, they seize the opportunities that are opening to them.

There was a fascinating programme the other week on TV which began with people who felt they were lucky and those who felt they were unlucky!

What the programme tried to show was that really it wasn't a matter of being in or out of luck. It was a matter of seizing the opportunities!

Paul and his friends (and hopefully ourselves) would want to put in differently. God opens up possibilities to us as we go about our lives. Sometimes those possibilities invite us to go in a completely new direction. It may be some form of service in the world,

- a new way of understanding our faith,
- the call to serve God in the church in a way we never thought would be our calling.
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But there is the urging of the Spirit of Jesus.

What is more, when we respond, we find there are the Lydia's of this world to help, encourage and support us.

God gives us people who help us in this new sphere of ministry. The danger we need to avoid is assuming that the pattern of life in the past must be the pattern God wants for our future.

He is the God of new opportunities and new directions.

Amen.