

# Sixth Sunday of Easter, New Testament, Year C

UP IN GREECE WITHOUT A PREACHER

Acts 16:9-15

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

9During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

11We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, 12and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. 13On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. 14A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. 15When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

DIAGNOSIS: When in Rome

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): The Center of the World?

Anyone who lived in a Roman colony had it good, and Philippi would have been no exception. Cities in Roman colonies were

often popular and influential. They were hubs of activity, progressive places where trade and cultures mixed. So what could an independent, successful businesswoman lack in such a place?

#### Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Off Center

The truth is, sometimes we don't know what we are lacking. And that was likely true for many who lived in Macedonia—after all, Paul hadn't made it past Turkey with the gospel before this trip. So no one would have heard about Christ yet. But Lydia wasn't just anyone. She was a worshiper of God—one of those Gentiles who looked in on and heard the teachings of the synagogue; an outsider peering into the mysteries of God. Who knows why she hadn't converted to Judaism; maybe she wasn't willing to surrender her business or her head-of-household status to become a proselyte. So, instead, she stayed outside the city where women were known to go to pray. Not in, but not quite out.

#### Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Hole in the Center

Not in, but not quite out. Lydia knew enough about God to make her curious. But somehow what she knew wasn't enough. So she sat by the river and prayed. But not a word about Christ was heard. Yet.

#### PROGNOSIS: When in Christ

#### Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Whole in the Center

Then Paul showed up, doing what he'd been called and set apart to do: Preach the gospel of Christ crucified and risen to the Gentiles. This, Paul would say to the women by the river at Philippi, is what God has done—given his whole self to restoring creation. God, in Christ, had given his life on the cross for the life of the world. And that world included businesswomen living in a Roman colony like Philippi.

#### Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution): Centered

This is news meant to make the broken whole. But before those broken can be made whole, they have to hear the news. So the Holy Spirit, doing what only the Holy Spirit can do, opened Lydia's heart and she began to listen eagerly to Paul's words about Jesus. Now Lydia had what had been missing; without Christ, she was a mere God-fearer. With Christ she feared nothing but losing Christ from the center of her life. So she plunged herself and her household into Christ in baptism.

#### Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Christ at the Center

Any woman who had the gumption to be a fine fabric dealer and a head of household in first-century Greece had to be a big deal. Lydia used her business acumen and her ability to benefit herself, yes. But in Christ she used her power of persuasion to invite others into God's grace in baptism and to practice hospitality with Paul and his cohort. Evidently, Paul wasn't the only one whom the Holy Spirit gave the gift of persuasion.