**Hospitable like Lydia**

Read Acts 16

This Lydia is only ever mentioned twice and only in this chapter. In this chapter Paul is on what is often referred to as his second journey as he goes about sharing the decision of the apostles in Jerusalem that gentiles need not be circumcised (ch. 15) and visiting the churches he had established on his first journey. As Paul is in Lystra he meets Timothy who is well regarded by the believers there and he invites Timothy to join him.

As they attempt to continue their journey, they are prevented by the Holy Spirit from going to Asia or Bithynia, instead they make their way to Troas where Paul receives a dream leading them to Philippi. As was the custom when there was no synagogue the believers gathered at the water source on the sabbath, in this case a river. A way of ensuring believers gathered wherever they may be. Here we are told that Paul and his companions began to speak to the women there. I find it interesting that they only speak to women – was it the case that there were no men, or would the men not listen?

Regardless, among the women was someone named Lydia, who was a worshipper of God and a dealer in purple cloth. According to my commentary her name indicates a slave or servant background but the fact she had a household and was able to invite people to her house suggest she is a freed woman. She is described as a follower of God prior to meeting Paul and his friends so she is likely a gentile who had already been attracted to the Jewish God. Paul brings to her the news of Christ and her heart is opened to respond.

Just how does she respond by being baptised with her whole household followed by a strong invitation to stay at her home. I wonder, why she needed to persuade them to stay? Perhaps because of the strong taboo’s about Jews accepting hospitality from gentiles. Perhaps because she was a single woman? (There is no indication of her marital status), perhaps something else entirely. Is this, as some suggest the proof that Paul was willing to practice what he preaches in Galatians 3:28 (“There is no neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”)

Even when they’re staying at Lydia’s house they continue to go to the place of prayer (the river) and on one such occasion get into trouble with the authorities for releasing a woman from a spirit. In fact, they were thrown into prison. Even after their remarkable release they return to Lydia’s house.

Here is one remarkable woman, she invites people she has only just met to stay at her house, and continues to give them a place to stay even when they’re being followed around the town by a possessed woman and causing trouble with her employers. Even after they are released, she is content to allow these men to remain in her house. Verse 40 even suggests that a group continued to meet there after Paul left.

**Questions**

1. Hospitality is not a new theme to the church, but does the story of Lydia teach us anything new regarding hospitality?
2. Have you ever invited strangers into your home? If so, how did it make you feel before, during and after? If not, what would have to happen for you to even consider it?
3. We are given very little information about Lydia as a person, if you could ask her one thing what would it be?