

Lydia: God's Will And My Response

"The Lord opened [Lydia's] heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." Acts 16:14

Opening Spoken Hymn – Jesus, Priceless Treasure

Jesus, priceless Treasure, Source of purest pleasure,
Truest friend to me. Long my heart hath panted,
Till it almost fainted, thirsting after Thee. Thine I am, O
spotless Lamb,
I will suffer naught to hide Thee, ask for naught beside
Thee.

Hence, all thought of sadness! For the Lord of gladness, Je-
sus, enters in.

Those who love the Father, though the storms may gather,
Still have peace within;

Yea, whate'er we here must bear, still in Thee lies purest pleasure, Jesus, priceless Treasure!

Confession and Absolution

P O God the Father in heaven, O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, O God the Holy Spirit,

C have mercy upon us and be gracious unto us.

P For having other gods before you, for putting our trust in ourselves, for our love of possessions, which is often greater than our love for Christ,

C forgive us, O Lord.

P For the cursing that comes out of our mouths or swearing falsely, for honoring you with our lips, but not with our hearts,

C forgive us, O Lord.

P For ignoring your gifts and your rest, for not being steadfast in our prayers, for hearing your Word and not doing it,

C forgive us, O Lord.

P For not honoring those who are in authority over us, for our lack of concern for our parents, for our disobedience to civic laws,



C forgive us, O Lord.

P For our low regard for human life, for the desire to avenge ourselves when we have been wronged, for anger with our brother or sister and hatred toward our neighbor,

C forgive us, O Lord.

P For all impurities in our lives; for the thoughts that darken our minds, for the lust that creeps into our hearts,

C forgive us, O Lord.

P For our willingness to gain wealth by any means, for our lack of concern for our neighbors' needs, for the poor stewardship we have made of our time, talent and treasure,

C forgive us, O Lord.

P For our disregard of our neighbors' reputations, for lies and slander, for betraying secrets and carrying on in gossip,

C forgive us, O Lord.

P For our sinful desires, for our covetous natures, for our hunger for things at the expense of our souls,

C forgive us, O Lord.

P Since you have confessed your sin to your heavenly Father, trusted the Son for your forgiveness, and asked the Spirit's help to amend your sinful life, hear again the promise of the Gospel: your sins are completely and permanently forgiven, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer of the Day

You seem to work in such inefficient ways, Lord—a whole missionary journey sidetracked so one woman far from her hometown could come to know Jesus! You prepared the way for Paul's word; you sent your Spirit into Lydia's heart; you alone deserve the praise for Lydia's saving faith. Open my heart, too, Lord; cause me to pay attention to your Word. Then make my response, like Lydia's, overflow into all areas of my life. And to you alone be the glory! Amen.

Children's Message - *welcome mat*

Hello, boys and girls. Today I am going to talk to you about something called response. This

is a word that means “what we do in return to someone or something.” (*Hold up welcome mat.*) What is this? (*Allow the children to respond.*) That’s right! It is a welcome mat. We use it to tell people that when they come to our home, we will respond with a welcoming attitude. We will greet them, we will ask them to come in, we will share our living space with them.

That is exactly what a woman named Lydia did in the Bible. When Paul and other followers of Jesus came to her town, she welcomed them into her home and invited them to stay with her. She did this in response to the love of Jesus that she had experienced and the joy she felt for those who had shared the good news of Jesus’ suffering and death for our salvation.

Like Lydia, we, too, are called by God to welcome people into our midst and celebrate the good news of Jesus with others. By our love and our friendship and our joyful attitude, we show to others how grateful we are to God for sending Jesus to save us, and how excited we are that others get to know about him, too.

Think of ways that you can be a welcoming presence to people you meet. Can you invite people to church with you? Is there someone you can read the Bible to? Maybe you know a person who would like you to pray with them. Or maybe there is just a boy or girl who would like someone to sit with them at lunch or play with them on the playground.

Everywhere you go this week, be on the lookout for someone to welcome with Jesus’ love. Let us pray: Thank you, dear Jesus, for dying on the cross for us and rising again on Easter. Help us to respond to your great love by being welcoming to others. Amen.

First Reading, Ephesians 1:15-23

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Second Reading, Luke 24:44-49

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be

fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Third Reading, Acts 16:6-10, 13-15,

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Message

Lydia following the will of God by responding in faith and hospitality when the Gospel message of Christ’s sacrifice was preached to her. We follow the will of God by responding in love and service to one another in return for what Christ has done for us. Let us hear from Lydia when she tells about God’s will and her response:

My name is Lydia, I’m from Thyatira and I sell purple. When I first met the Apostle Paul, he **howled with laughter** when he heard I was from Thyatira.

You won’t know why that’s funny. You probably don’t even know where Thyatira is. It’s in Asia minor. And no, that’s not where I met him. I met Paul in Philippi, where I live now—me, the children and the servants. When Claudio died, I ...

Claudio,,,,, He was my owner and then my husband. (It’s not as complicated as it sounds.) Claudio was a merchant, travelling around the empire selling purple dye. It was his idea to settle here in Philippi, even though the dye itself comes from places like Thyatira, in the region called Lydia—that’s where Claudio bought me. It’s also where he gave me my freedom, and I took my name Lydia from there.

Claudio loved me and accepted me for who I was, even when I was a slave and had nothing. I should have learned from that. I should have learned about love. I became his wife: we ran the business together, then moved here to Philippi. I nursed him through his illness, and he left me the business. That was a long time ago.

It's unusual—a woman running a business like this—but not unheard of, and ... well, dyes and pigments? I'd learned those things from Claudio, at least.

I was never fully accepted by the other merchants: a woman—an ex-slave at that!—running a business and a household. I got by. But you know, my free name, Lydia, always reminds me of home, and of Claudio's care for me.

It was here in Philippi that I discovered the Hebrew religion. The gods I grew up with were every bit as foul as human beings. You bribed them with offerings and hoped they didn't bother you. Best thing was to stay out of their way and hope that they stayed out of yours.

I remember how we used to frighten each other as little girls—don't be looking too pretty, or Zeus will have his eye on you. Growing up, we were always hearing of plagues or exploding mountains when the gods were displeased with this or that.

But the stories of the Hebrew God—so different!! He cares about us humans like a parent. Look, he took the Hebrews under his wing and stuck with them even when they were disobedient, disciplining them, delivering them from the war chariots of old Egypt, with them complaining all the way.

Zeus would've fried the whole nation to a crisp with a thunderbolt. Instead, this "I AM" prepared a land flowing with milk and honey. And he prepared a people to live in it. Imagine that! Now THAT's someone worth calling God!

Anyway, about 20 of us in Philippi worship the Hebrew God, but because most of us are women, we didn't have the quorum needed for a synagogue. Miriam said that in such a case, it was traditional for us to meet to worship near a river or creek—convenient for ritual washing and other ceremonies.

Those Jews ... they will wash anything you haven't nailed down, and some things you have. We wash ourselves, our hands, any pots or vessels. I came to associate the sound of flowing, laughing water with the Jewish God, and the promise of flowing milk and honey.

Claudio once told me about a philosopher who said something about a river. Something about time flowing ... it made me shiver. His religion, my old religion, hurries by you while you just stand there. It doesn't need you; it doesn't have much to do with you.

But the God of flowing milk and honey, of living water? How different! How warm and sweet

and alive. And it felt as if ... I don't know ... almost as if he were preparing me all along for this—for him.

But, as I said, it's traditional for Jews to meet in a place near water, so when Paul and his friends came to town and learned there wasn't a synagogue, he came looking for a meeting place like this.

But he didn't expect to meet me, a Thyatiran. I was among Hebrews and living in Philippi, but no one would mistake me for either a Jew or a Philippian—for anything but a Thyatiran! And that's why he laughed so. I thought it was just a coincidence, but he didn't. You see, he had been planning to go to Thyatira—he felt strongly he'd had an appointment to give his message to people from there. But God sent him a vision telling him to go another direction.

He laughed and laughed to find out that he had been right all along. He was meant to share his message with someone from Thyatira, just not in Thyatira. I'll bet he also didn't expect it to be a woman! Laughing like that, I thought him kind of weird.

He had a message about a Jew named Jesus, which at first didn't mean much to me. But before he told us his message, he listened. He listened! That got my attention, you know. Not many people listened to me. Maybe because I'm a woman, or maybe because everywhere I go, I'm different. You'd think it would make them curious: "How in the world did you get here, Lydia?" But no one, especially the men, ever asked. Some ignored me. Others tried to impress me by talking about themselves. I think some of my friends assumed I would feel less like a foreigner if we didn't talk about my slave days. But not talking about my past made me feel more out of place, even less at home, less accepted.

I didn't let it bother me. With my wealth, I had plenty of "friends" or at least acquaintances. They didn't cost me that much. No one got close, no one really knew me, really listened. I had the house, the children, good food and business to keep me occupied. But Paul, he listened, he wanted to hear. It didn't make him uncomfortable. And what a strange man! He had lots of friends who were slaves or used to be slaves, but he knew wealthy people, and city officials, too. So he didn't act superior about my background, and he wasn't threatened by my success.

We talked a little about him and his visions; it was clear that he often felt as though he didn't fit in, either. He was very, very Jewish of course, but also a Roman citizen, and now had become a follower of Jesus—Paul promised to tell us all a lot about Jesus over lunch—but all of it often made him feel he was never really at home, and didn't really belong, he said.

"That's exactly how I feel," I remember saying to him, "I don't belong anywhere, really, either. Here I am, a Thyatiran stuck in Philippi, a former slave now running a household; a Gentile in the Jewish place of prayer; a businessman who is a woman."

“Sometimes,” I said to him, “I wish there was somewhere people didn’t care where you came from, didn’t care whether you were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female.”

“Well,” he said, “As it happens ...” And that’s when we all broke some bread together and he told us all about Jesus and his gospel. And what good news it was! I’d been right about the Jewish God. But what he had done in the past was as nothing compared to the thing he had done now! No, that’s not quite right. It’s like the same signature, the same handwriting ... or the same dye ... but in a much deeper hue. The love of the Father expressed by giving his Son for us ... for ME!

Oh, dear Claudio, forgive me. And thank you for forgiving me, Jesus. I’d lost who I was. I thought I could be accepted and loved for what I had. But that becomes like any other deal: get as much as you can from the other, while giving away as little as you can of your own. That’s not acceptance; that’s not love. That’s just more business. Who needs that? And it doesn’t give anyone what they really need.

But I know now that in Christ, God accepts me as his child, not for what I can do or make or sell, but for who I am. He has given everything freely; there’s no more bargaining. That frees me to respond with everything I am, freely. I’m accepted for who I am; and what I have becomes useful, too—the church meets in my home now, and I can even help feed and care for some of the others from my plenty.

Do they deserve it? *[laughs with joy]* No, they don’t!

Thank God, none of us will get what we deserve in the eyes of God. No one deserves or earns what they get in Jesus’ kingdom—everything is a gift; everything was created to be given away, not earned, owned or hoarded. But what you have... you don’t spend it like it’s an entrance fee; what you have... it’s a response. A thank you. A “thank God that’s not all I am.”

I understand now just how Paul felt when we met. Remember I told you how he howled with laughter when he found out I was from Thyatira? God prepared Paul to speak to a Thyatiran, and he did—in a place he didn’t expect. And God prepared me to be with him, but I never expected ... this!

The Lord God doesn’t just give us a gift, he prepares us to receive it—working and shaping us for a lifetime sometimes. And when we do receive it, undeserving as we are, he himself has given us the response. You see? It’s all his, even the “thank you.” Because when I do respond with everything I am... well, he made me all that I am. It’s all his, all of it—the gift, the search, the finding, the response all his. All his. Grace upon grace upon grace.

And so ... I know who and what I am now. I’m no longer some ex-slave, semi-Jewish woman who runs a business. I’m Lydia, one of the followers of Jesus. Amen.

Spoken Hymn of the Evening – Worthy the Lamb

Hear the cries of the shackled from the onset of time,
For the chains of defeat there's no key.
See the tears of the broken, the cries of the slaves:
Is there no one worthy to set us free?
Worthy the Lamb that was slain.

Then the crying is stilled as the rings out,
The shackled released from their chains.
And thousands of voices are swelling the song
Worthy the Lamb that was slain.

Then all the archangels, the saints of all time
Holding their crowns in their hands
Fall down before Him joining the song
Worthy the Lamb that was slain.
Worthy the Lamb that was slain.

Prayers (O Lord, who gave your life, **help us return your love with love.)**

O Lord, like Lydia, we are called to welcome those who share the news of your salvation into our midst. Give us the courage to support the needs of those who preach and teach your Word, even when it is not always something that the society around us values. Grant us the willingness to open our doors to your ambassadors and to listen well to what they have to share with us. O Lord, who gave your life, **help us return your love with love.**

Lydia was a successful businesswoman as well as a believer in Christ. Embolden us to bear your cross into our places of business and our work life so that more may know that you are the supreme ruler of our lives, and that it is more important to store up treasures in heaven than to seek after earthly wealth and prestige. Help us to be loving and forgiving to all we interact with in our jobs, reflecting your compassion toward us. O Lord, who gave your life, **help us return your love with love.**

All those in Lydia's household came to believe in you and were baptized. Help us to be a positive spiritual influence on the faith lives of all those who dwell in our households and our neighborhoods. May our words and actions declare to those nearest and dearest to us that you are the ultimate source and strength of everything we say and do. O Lord, who gave your life, **help us return your love with love.**

Be with all those who are suffering in any way of body, mind and spirit, especially Margie and Sonya, Marlis and Terry, Jeff and Evonne, Kirk and Arlis, and all those that we name silently now in our hearts..... Restore health to them according to your will, and bless them with people like Lydia who respond to your love by caring for them in their time of need. Help us

to see ways in which we can serve those around us who are hurting that we may be able to touch them with your peace, comfort and hope. O Lord, who gave your life, **help us return your love with love.**

All these petitions we offer in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, who did the will of God and lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever and be with us now as we say the prayer that Jesus taught us.....

Lord's Prayer

Our father who art in heaven hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Blessing

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Now may the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you his peace. Amen

Closing Hymn – Wounded for Me

Wounded for me, wounded for me
There on the cross He was wounded for me
Now I'm forgiven and now I am free
All because Jesus was wounded for me

Dying for me, dying for me
There on the cross He was dying for me
Now in His death my redemption I see
All because Jesus was dying for me

I will praise You, I will praise You for the life You gave
What else can I say? Oh my Savior, friend and Savior
All my heart is Yours. Forevermore

Mark your calendars:

- Palm Sunday/Confirmation – Sunday, March 28 th at 9AM at Nora
- Maundy Thursday – Thursday, April 1 st at 7PM at Kirkebo
- Good Friday – Friday, April 2 nd at 7PM at Nora
- Easter Service – Sunday, April 5 th at 9AM at Kirkebo

All Services will be in-person (practicing safety guidelines) and live streamed on Facebook Live

If you wish to donate for Palms/Lillies in honor or memory of someone they can be sent to the Parish office by Friday, March 26th. Please email the office of your intention to donate prior to the 26th so the names can be placed into the bulletin for the services.

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