

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – Acts 16:11-15 – May 2nd, 2021

Today the confirmands are confessing their faith in Jesus as their Savior. That's an important thing. Jesus says, "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge them before my Father in heaven." It's a wonderful thing to confess your faith. And we understand that faith is not a static thing. Martin Luther said that faith is a living, active mighty thing. It never stops doing good works. That's what Jesus was talking about in the Gospel for today when he said, "I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit."

What Jesus means by that is that you will express your faith in deeds. You will express your faith in good works. We have a great example of that today in the book of Acts. Lydia bore much fruit. She expressed her faith in good works. And the main thing that I want us to see about Lydia today is that she *insisted* on bearing fruit.

Lydia was a Gentile. But she worshiped the true God, the God of Israel. It says that she was "a worshiper of God." It must have been hard to be a worshiper of the true God in Philippi because it doesn't seem like there were a whole lot of people in Philippi who worshiped the true God. You see many commentators explain that it took ten Jewish men for there to be a synagogue. But where Lydia worships isn't called a synagogue. It's called a "place of prayer." And it says that Paul and his companions talked to the women who had gathered there. Since Luke doesn't mention any men, a lot of people have figured that there weren't even ten Jewish men in Philippi so that they could constitute a synagogue. So apparently the worshipers of the true God in Philippi were very small in number. But Lydia insisted on bearing fruit. She and the other women still gathered at a place of prayer to worship the true God.

It will sometimes be hard for you to maintain your faith in today's world. There will times when the worshipers of the true God seem to be very few. The way to maintain your faith is to do what Lydia did. Keep going to the place of prayer to gather with your fellow believers and worship the true God.

Lydia had come to the place of prayer that day to pray and to worship the true God with her fellow believers. And on that day Paul and his companions came to the place of prayer and told them about Jesus. As Lydia listened to what Paul said, "the Lord opened her heart" (Acts 16:14).

And the Lord has opened your heart too. The Lord Jesus has opened your heart with the message of sins forgiven and the message of eternal life. The Lord Jesus has opened your heart with the message that he loves you so much that he came and died on the cross for all of your sins. The Lord has opened your heart with the message that the angel opened the tomb and it was empty because God raised Jesus from the dead. And that means that our greatest enemy, death, has been swallowed up in victory. Lydia was baptized. When you were baptized all your sins were washed away.

This message opened Lydia's heart and made her a believer in the Lord. She freely confessed her faith in the Lord. She said, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord." Today is confirmation

Sunday. One aspect of confirmation is that it is a chance for young people to confess their faith in Jesus. Jesus once said, “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” Here Lydia acknowledges Jesus before people. She says, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord...” and her faith in Jesus led to good works. She said, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.”

You see, Paul and his companions were far from home. They needed a place to stay and they needed food to eat. Lydia offers to host the missionary team. Lydia was apparently a person who had some wealth. She was a seller of purple clothing. Purple clothing in those days was very expensive. She had a house big enough to host the missionary team. And so she invited Paul and his companions to come and stay at her house.

And not only did Lydia offer to host the missionary team, she *insisted* on hosting the missionary team. One commentator points out that perhaps Paul and the rest of the missionary team at first said, “No, thank you.” It’s not that they didn’t appreciate the offer. I was recently talking with someone about this passage and he pointed out that Paul was often reluctant to accept aid and help. Paul preferred to work as a tent maker and pay his own way. There were a couple of reasons for this. He considered it his free will offering to the Lord. He would preach the gospel without receiving pay and perhaps it extended to accepting lodging. But Lydia insisted on hosting the mission team. It says, “She persuaded us.” The Greek word used here is a strong word. My Greek dictionary says that it means to use force.¹ “She compelled us.” Someone once put it this way: “She wouldn’t take ‘No’ for an answer.” She would not give up until, “She persuaded us” (16:15). Lydia insisted on bearing fruit.²

When it comes to bearing fruit, when it comes to good works, are we passive? Do we ever half-heartedly offer to help. Or are we more active and insistent like Lydia? We can be more like Lydia by being active and insistent on bearing fruit. When we see someone or hear of someone who needs help, we can actively and wholeheartedly help them.

The reason Lydia did these good works, is because she was so thankful for what Jesus had done for her. She says, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord...” The reason we do good works is because we are so thankful for what Jesus has done for us. The Lord has opened our hearts with the message of his full and free forgiveness. We confess that faith. And we show that faith by insisting on bearing fruit. Amen.

¹ BDAG.

² I owe many of the insights in this paragraph to Prof. Joel Fredrich at Martin Luther College.