

Peculiar Treasures - May 10, 2020

And so today on this Mother's Day, we continue our series on Peculiar Treasures, looking at these odd and different and unique and special individuals that God has called to be part of his kingdom. And it's also You and I. We're also a part of these peculiar treasures. But we've been looking at some of these people.

And today on this day when we remember our mothers we'll be looking at Lydia. And we'll be seeing how God, when he calls us, doesn't call us to change our character completely and become totally different people, but how he uses the gifts, the talents, the abilities that he has created in us to continue to do his good work. He refocuses us in a different direction.

Over this series, Dayna and I have looked at Thomas and we've seen how, in Thomas, that doubt is okay, but so is trust, trusting not only in God, but trusting in the witness of the church as a whole. We've looked at Peter and we've seen how when God calls us to be his followers, that changes our lives completely. And Jesus's resurrection doesn't allow us to go back to our old way of living. It calls us into a new direction. Now, we would like to have a little more specifics about what that new direction looks like. But he gives us enough to show us that we are there to serve and to guide his people into the holiness that he is calling them to be.

And last week, Pastor Dayna looked us through the life of Philemon and Onesimus and how they're in this crazy interaction of a new body of believers that were following Jesus, how there, the reality of our forgiveness in Christ changes the way that we interact with others, especially those who might have hurt us or harmed us in the past. So Onesimus owns up to his running away and goes back to make things right with his master. And Paul asks Philemon to forgive him and accept him not just as a runaway slave, but as a fellow believer, completely altering the way that they would engage with one another in that space.

And today, we look at this short little passage about Lydia, where we don't really know a whole lot about her. But what we do see is we catch this amazing glimpse

of an amazing woman. Now, we do know that she's an answer to prayer, as Paul and his companions are moving around trying to find places to share the good news about who Jesus is, and they're kept by the Holy Spirit from going in certain places. I have no idea what that means. And I wish I did know; it might make it easier for me to understand where the Spirit is leading me and maybe you as well, but for some reason, Paul's not allowed to go into these other places, and then he gets this vision of a man from Macedonia. And calling him to come and help. So Paul and his companions assume quite rightly, I would say, that this was a vision from God and that then they should go and set sail and so they immediately go down to Troas and set sail to Macedonia. They go into this particular region and they just happen to go to one of the major Roman colonies, which is Philippi. While on the Sabbath day they just happened to go down to the place, to the river where they hope to find a place of prayer. And then they just happened to meet this lady from Thyatira named Lydia.

This is verse 14. So Acts chapter 16, verse 14, one of those listening there was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia. Now Lydia was a dealer which means she ran her own business, pretty big deal in that timeframe. She was a dealer in purple cloth now purple cloth was for royalty and for rich people. The dye that was used to make the cloth was extremely expensive and valuable. So for Lydia to be a dealer in purple cloth, she ran a business that was exclusive that was expensive and that catered to the highest tiers of society there in Philippi. And it says she was a worshipper of God. She was someone who was not a Jew, but had decided to ally themselves or to follow the God of the Jewish people. So in some way, God had already been working in her heart, calling her to him. And then the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

So here God has been working in this woman's heart long before Paul shows up. And Paul goes to Macedonia having no idea how he is supposed to help. There's this man from Macedonia saying come and help me and he comes down to this place on the very first Sabbath day, the very first Saturday that he meets someone, he meets Lydia, this dealer in purple cloth, and the Lord opens her hearts to receive Paul's message. Now watch this.

This is where we get a little glimpse of who Lydia is, when she and the members of her household were baptized, so this might be just her own intimate and

individual family. But it may and probably more likely refer to her entire business, everyone that was involved in her household in providing for her family, all of her servants, all of her slaves, all of the people that we would now term to be employees, it would be like one of those of you who run a business suddenly converting to something else and then working to convince and persuade every single person that works with you in that business, to also be converted to this other religion. I mean, Lydia is amazing here. This shows you the sense of love and respect that the people have for her not only her immediate family, but also those and even those who work for her.

She and her household were all baptized. And so then she invited us to her home, the writer of Acts says. So Paul, and those who are with him then become invited to stay at Lydia's home. I don't think that this simply means that they can go and stay the night there and spend a little bit of time. It seems as though Lydia is actually inviting Paul and his companions to set up the new church that will be built in Philippi. There in her house. Come and stay at my place. Come and start this church in my home, come and tell all of these people the good news about who Jesus is and one of the reasons why we know that this is the case, or at least I think that this is the case, is after Paul and Silas are released from jail and the jailer is converted, they go back to Lydia's house. This is the end of Acts chapter 16. When the magistrates release Paul and apologize for what they did, Paul and Silas come out of prison, and they go to Lydia's house where they met with the brothers and sisters, and encouraged them and then they left to go on to somewhere else.

Lydia is quite the individual. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she says, come and stay at my house now. She doesn't leave Paul much of an option, right?

And this just gives you a little glimpse in her persuasive power. If you consider me a believer, then come and stay at my house, come and start the church here in my business, basically and she persuaded us. Now that Greek word that is translated "persuaded" is called "parabiadzomai". You can try to give that a shot at home if you want. "Parabiadzomai". It's a word in which it's only used a few times and it indicates high level of coercion, I guess would be a way to put it. It's the same word that's used when the two disciples were on the road to Emmaus

compel or argue with Jesus and urged him to stay with them the night. It's a word that literally means to move towards a certain point, so to force or to press or to compel or to coerce. Now, I think it takes quite an individual to coerce Paul to do anything, as you read through the writer's descriptions of who Paul is and if you read through his letters it doesn't seem like he's easily convinced to do anything he doesn't want to do. And yet here we get this image and Luke for whatever reason uses this little this word about Lydia that she compelled. Paul. She was so persuasive, so coercive, so helpful and so eager to have them do this that she was the one that was able to move them to the point where they agreed to start the church in her home in a time when women weren't always allowed to contribute and sometimes they were actually seen as property. Lydia is running an expensive, exclusive and highly common competitive business serving the upper echelons of the society.

Reminds me, reminds me of the Wife of Noble Character, the end of Proverbs. This is Proverbs chapter 31 talks about. How amazing She is and this is this images Just incredible. She gets up while still nature, provides food for family, she portions for her female servants she considers a field and she buys it out of her earnings. She plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously. Her arms are strong for her task. She sees that her trading is profitable and her lamp does not stop go out at night in her hand. She holds the distaff and she grabs the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy and when it snows she has no fear for her household for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed she's clothed and fine linen purple (she's extremely successful in other words). Her husband is respected at the city gates where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She increases his reputation. She makes linen garments and she sells them, she supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity. She can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and she does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed. Her husband also, he praises her. Many women do noble things but you surpass them all.

This is an incredible image. Much like Lydia .Yeah, and I have to admit that I used to think, when I was little, for some reason I had this image my head about the way that a woman is supposed to be, is kind of this meek and mild and calm

woman that sits off to the side. Someone that's quiet and doesn't do a whole lot. And and I think there are certain Christian traditions that urge that as well, and they saw that is the proper way that a woman should be. You have these images of this wife in Proverbs and of Lydia, of people and women who are powerful and who are strong and who are coercive and who do amazing things and who are successful. And if that's the image that you received, that image that women are somehow second rate if you've received that in your work and I want to apologize for the ways in which that has happened to you. And if you are a man, I also want to apologize to you because when we do not and are not able to see the value and see women as equal in our task, in equal partners in what we do. And equal in the Gospel, as Paul says there is no or female now in the Gospel. We are all one in the Lord, we have different tasks. For sure, but we're equal of Honor. And God calls us to be and to use the gifts and talents and abilities that He has provided for us.

It took both Adam and Eve to image God. Way back in the beginning when God says Let Us make man Mankind and humankind in our image, he made them male and female. Both provide us an image of who God is and both genders help us to understand a little bit More about who God is neither of us are second class.

No, I'm not suggesting that women have to be this then either. They have to be like this wife of noble character that's in Proverbs. Nor do they have to be like Lydia. My question is that in the Bible we see time and time again that God calls certain individuals. He uses the gifts the talents and abilities that character that they have already, He uses that in the furthering of His kingdom. Sometimes we think we have to fit a particular mold and I remember I used to have this when I was younger and when I thought about what it meant to be a pastor and one of the reasons why I resisted the call to ministry was because I thought that to become a pastor meant to be a certain kind of person. And then to be the kind of person that was, I don't know maybe the image that you have of someone who's a pastor. I didn't have a particularly good image of what a pastor was when I was a kid.

But then when I got the call, I realized that no God's calling me in all of my uniqueness to serve in this role. He's not calling me to change, to be a particular kind of thing

The same is true For you. Whatever it is that God is calling you to, God is calling you in all of the gifts, talents and abilities that you have. It may mean that you need to shift our behaviors some and there are some rough edges that need to be worn down and there's ways in which we need to leave behind bad behaviors and bad habits and things that are flaws in our character and allow the Spirit to create us into people who are good, and who are, who are better at doing the things that he's calling us to do, but that's the point is God calls us to do the things he calls us to do.

Your gifts, talents and abilities are unique to you. You are a peculiar treasure much like any of God's followers.

And so you then are also called to serve the way that God has called you to serve.

Now, we don't know much about Lydia after her conversion and after what we just read here, but we do know that she is crucial in establishing this church in Philippi. And we also know that she welcomes the Philippian jailer and his family into her home, into that original church gathering as he's one of the next converts that is mentioned in this church. We know that this church continues to support Paul and his journeys even after he left us he writes a letter back to them full of thankfulness and full of praise for them and for their community and for what they do. You look at Philippians chapter one. Paul gushes in praise and joy for them. He says. Philippians one, verse three, I thank my God every time I remember you and all of my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy, because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day, from the first day where he met Lydia there on that riverbank, that place of prayer where she was converted, and she gave her life and she compelled Paul to go and stay with him to start that community from that first day right up until now, as Paul was writing this, being confident of this, Paul says that he who began a good work and you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus and we see in this letter Paul is just full of praise for this church because he sees so much good happening here.

This letter actually contains one of the most I would say one of the most incredible and amazing descriptions of who Jesus is. And one of the most challenging statements to his followers. We see in Philippians chapter two, Paul says if you have any encouragement, being united with Christ if there's any comfort from his love, if you have any common sharing in the Holy Spirit, if there's any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete. Paul says, By being like minded having the same love being one in Spirit and with one life, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you looking to the interests of others in your relationships with one another. Paul says, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature, God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness, and being found in appearances as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name, that of the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Now, I recognize that in some ways, I'm reading between the lines in this story. We don't know exactly the role that he played in this early community. But given some of the things that we know about what it would have been like for a woman to be a dealer and purple cloth in a Roman colony, in this time frame, we have an idea of the kind of woman that Lydia is and I would find it very difficult to believe that she did not have a major role in shaping the community that met in her house to help become the kind of community that Paul could write this kind of a letter too, she seems to be an amazing and remarkable woman. God had been at work in her long before Paul showed up. And when she accepted Jesus, God used all of those talents, gifts and abilities to do incredible things.

So today, today as you honor your mother, your unique mother, as you remember and perhaps even grieve the loss of the mother or, or the hurt that came from having that or not having relationship with your mother, or maybe you are worried about the ways in which you don't fulfill the typical role of a mother or maybe you

just forget that God has called you uniquely, to be who you are. To me, you use the gifts, the talents, the abilities that God has given you to help shape this world for good. To be an amazing influence in this world may we remember that God calls each and every one of us to use the things that he is creating within us to shape this community for good, and to bring wholeness and happiness here in this space, they we always know, the one who calls us calls us to serve as the unique individuals that he has made and is making us to be

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