

Today we continue reading from the New Testament book of Acts. Acts tells the stories of the early church. We will be reading today from the 16th chapter. This chapter includes stories from the 2nd of Paul's missionary journeys.

Paul felt commissioned by God to go out into the world and share the stories he knew about Jesus. Acts records Paul taking four of these long journeys to towns situated around the Mediterranean Sea.

But we learn in these stories that Paul needs companions along the way. Men and women who provide the support of human contact and financial resources. The chapter begins with Paul meeting Timothy, a man with mixed racial heritage. Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was Greek.

Paul is with Timothy and also Silas and they begin this missionary journey together. In this part of Acts, Paul revisits churches that he had started in his first missionary journey. Paul finds out that some of the churches are going well while others are not.

Paul wants to take them with him and go to Asia. But the Holy Spirit does not allow them to go to Asia. Paul wants to go to the town of Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit does not allow them to go to Bithynia. Sometimes God opens doors and sometimes God closes doors.

Paul then has a vision. And this is where we pick up the story.

Read Acts 16:9-15

Last summer, a family with a two-year-old son spent a weekend at a nice resort in Arizona. As these guests were packing up to leave for the airport, the mom realized her son had lost his favorite Thomas the Tank Engine toy.

Flagging down two frontline employees, Jessy Long and Nathan Cliff, the guest explained what was at stake since this Thomas toy was her little boy's favorite and the loss would be heartbreaking for him.

Employees Long and Cliff failed to locate the lost Thomas train, but realizing how much this mattered to the guests, they agreed together that something must be done. After the guests left the property for their flight home, the two employees drove to a toy store and purchased an absolute dead ringer of the original train for the little boy.

The two employees then composed a note in longhand to the boy in the voice of Thomas the Tank Engine telling a sweet tale about the extended vacation the little locomotive had taken after being accidentally left behind. The account included adorable pictures of Thomas exploring the property, cooking in the kitchen wearing a miniature chef's hat on his head, and many more adventures.

Four days after the disappearance of the original Thomas, the replacement arrived by FedEx, with the note about the train's adventures. That, my friends, is what great hospitality looks like.

The text we have read today is a story about companionship and hospitality. Paul realized that he could not make his journeys alone. That he needed a companion. Paul found that companion in Timothy and Silas. The young people who would become his confidants.

Paul sets out on their journey but then Paul has a vision that leads him to Greece. It's called Macedonia in our text but it's the country of Greece today. The edge of Europe.

Specifically they find themselves led to the town of Philippi. Described as a Roman colony, Philippi was a Gentile town. Going outside the city, Paul finds a group of women in prayer.

One of the women stands out to Paul. Her name is Lydia. She is described as a worshipper of God and a businesswoman who deals in expensive purple cloth. The text says that the Lord opens her heart and she is able to hear what Paul has to say. She is so moved that Lydia has her entire household baptized by Paul.

But then Lydia is led one step further in her faith. She invites Paul and Timothy to come and stay at her house. She extends hospitality. And this will not be the last time that we read of Lydia's hospitality.

Later, Paul and Silas are thrown into prison by the authorities. A story we will read about next Sunday. After they are released from prison, they return to Lydia's house where she puts them up after another difficult experience. The gift of hospitality.

The gift of hospitality is a gift that cannot be overlooked in this passage. Lydia provides that place for nourishment and companionship. Lydia provides welcome and encouragement.

Many of us have the gift of hospitality and encouragement. It is a special gift that cannot be overlooked today. There are many here who focus on listening to the needs of others and then finding out what they can do to make the journey easier for the other. For some of us, hospitality comes naturally.

But all of us can practice hospitality in some capacity. Whether it's offering a drink of water to someone who is thirsty, an offer to do something for someone who has a lot to get done, or going the extra mile when you see something out of place that will cause someone else to have to work harder to correct.

Hospitality is a special gift that we celebrate today. I began with a story of hospitality at a nice resort. But today we can also celebrate the people who have shown us hospitality.

Later in the service during the prayers of the people we are going to lift up the names of people who have shown us hospitality in some way. Maybe it was a warm bed when we needed a place to stay. Maybe it was a meal and a time of fellowship. Maybe it was a ride when we were injured. Maybe it was encouragement when we were down.

We can become so consumed with the difficulties in our lives that we do not pay attention to the hospitality that is being shown to us by others. Since Lydia was a businesswoman who sold purple cloth, I am going to invite us to connect hospitality and care to the color purple.

Whenever you see the color purple, allow your mind to think about a person who has shown you hospitality. Whenever you see the color purple, think about some way that you can show hospitality to another.

Lydia provided hospitality to Paul. Without Lydia, Paul's journeys would have been much, much, more difficult.

Today we can be thankful for the people who have shown us hospitality.

And we can be open to seeing the opportunities to show hospitality to others.
AMEN.

+++++=====

-Solomon, Micah, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2017/07/29/5-wow-customer-service-stories-from-5-star-hotels-examples-any-business-can-learn-from/?sh=4973af9833e6>

-Given: May 22, 2022 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)