



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

May 5, 2024

The Purple Reign of Lydia

Recap of service from May 5, 2024

Scripture: Acts 16:11-15, 35-40

Every Sunday we gather in this big beautiful building on Fifth Avenue in Rock Island. We are proud of our history, the stained glass, the remodeled west entrance, and the versatile sanctuary. We see our group of people with a few visitors. We see our pastor, with an occasional guest speaker. We see the Cross and Flame, but it is easy to forget about the wider church that is behind that symbol.

We are a part of a “connectional” church. We are connected to other United Methodist congregations in our area and around the world. I am reminded of that every time I welcome Barutwanayo Jacques, who came to this church more than ten years ago because of that Cross and Flame, and has been a vital member ever since. I was also reminded of this last week as I was glued to my laptop watching the events of the postponed 2020 General Conference of the United Methodist Church unfold.

I wept tears of joy many times over the course of the week as I released so much tension and anxiety over what might transpire. I went into the General Conference hopeful that the “Three R’s” would pass (see reverse for details), but I wasn’t sure. As vote after vote reshaped our denomination I was reminded of the importance of connection. I was reminded of the clergy in our conference that kept me going. I was reminded of the young people at Hope Church and the Surge youth group that inspired me to continue to lead. I was reminded of the courage of our congregation to have difficult discussions before we had to—so that we could fully embrace a day such as this. We are connected to one another—by finances, mission, prayer, service, and our witness. This “connectional” thing that is a part of our United Methodist DNA was begun in the ancient church with women like Lydia.

Lydia is easy to miss in this chapter from Acts. Most believe the “meat” of this story is in the parts that we skipped—when Paul and Silas go into the city of Philippi and get down to business doing “real” ministry. That position is somewhat understandable, as the series of events that happen in between Lydia’s two appearances are quite remarkable.

There is a fortune teller, a public healing, an angry businessman, a riled-up mob, a public beating, an earthquake, a conversion of a jailer, and a public scolding of the city officials. This story is juicy, to say the least. Paul’s refusal to go away silently in the night is delicious. Yet the meal is not complete without Lydia.

She, a dealer in purple cloth, is a leader in a prayer gathering

outside the city gate. Philippi was a Roman colony established for retired Roman soldiers who helped Augustus Caesar claim his throne. It likely that there was not a synagogue allowed to gather inside the city, so this group of women took it upon themselves to gather, pray to God, read the Torah and the Prophets, and encourage

each other. They, with Lydia at their lead, welcomed the good news of Christ that Paul brought. When Paul got out of jail, Lydia’s home had already become the gathering place for the new believers.

The church of Philippi was born in Lydia’s household. Later, when Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he thanked them for their support when he was traveling. In other words, Paul was connected to the Philippian church—which was born in Lydia’s home—as he traveled throughout the Empire. Even in the end, while imprisoned in Rome, he was able to gain strength from his connection to the Philippians.

This is a reminder of who we are, and who we always have been. We are a connected church. We do not simply gather in our building and do “our thing.” We draw strength from one another. We will continue to build our relationships with congregations like Church of Peace UCC and The House, but this week reminded me of the importance of our United Methodist connection.

UMC Pastors from Milan, East Moline, Moline, Colona, and myself met together last week. We are planning on expanding our reach and inviting more to come to our conversations. We are looking at a new era of United Methodism in the Quad Cities.

I am excited about what has happened in the last week. Like Paul and Lydia, the connected church is a source of strength and encouragement. The Holy Spirit unites us in the baptismal creed that “There is no Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free, nor is there man and women, but we are all one in Christ Jesus.” And so we move together as a United Methodist Church, connected to each other.



**Next Week: Part 4 of 4 “The Women of Acts”
Prisca, Co-Worker Acts 18:1-3, 18-19, 24-28**