

## **Choose Faith, Not Fear**

Acts 16:9-15

May 13, 2007

Mother's Day

Today is Mother's Day. It is a day that we are all familiar with because we all have had mothers at one time or another.

I have a feeling (Now I could be wrong about this. Maybe other men don't share my perspective. But I have a feeling.) that Mother's Day is more important to Mothers than Father's Day is for fathers. At least that is how it is in our family. Father's Day rolls around and I pay little attention. Father's Day is no big deal to me. It comes and goes and I don't much care one way or another, but woe to me or any of our children who forget mom's special day.

There are some ways to know that you're a mom. For example, according to one of my preaching journals, (Homiletics) you are a mom when:

- Your feet stick to the kitchen floor and you don't care.
- You can't find your cordless phone so you ask your husband or a friend to call you so you can follow the sound of the ringing.
- Your idea of a good day is making it through without a child leaking bodily fluids on you.
- Your favorite television show is a cartoon.
- Peanut butter and jelly is featured in at least one meal a day.
- You're willing to kiss your child's boo-boo no matter where it is.
- Your baby's pacifier falls on the floor and you invoke the five second rule. As long as it is on the floor for less than five seconds, it can go back in her mouth
- Your kids make jokes about burping and other bodily noises and you think they're funny.
- Spit is your number one cleaning agent.
- You are up until 10 or 11 o'clock each night after spending a day dusting, vacuuming, doing laundry, changing diapers, helping with homework, folding clothes, walking the dog, ironing, bathing, gardening, painting, and finger painting. You get up at 5:30 am and have no time to eat, drink, or go to the bathroom, and still gain ten pounds.

Where would we be without mothers? They teach us so many things.

- They teach us logic. "If you fall off that swing and break your neck, you can't go to the store with me."
- They teach us medicine. "If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they're going to freeze that way."
- They teach us ESP. "Put your sweater on; don't you think I know when you're cold?"

- They teach us how to meet challenges. “Where’s your brother and don’t talk to me with food in your mouth. Now answer me.”
- They teach us how to have a sense of humor. “If you cut your toes off with that lawn mower, don’t come running to me.”

The Scripture lesson for this morning is from the book of Acts, and is about a woman named Lydia. We don’t know if she was a mother or not because the text doesn’t tell us. If I had to guess, I would guess that she was. I base that view on the 15<sup>th</sup> verse of chapter 16 in which it notes that she was baptized along with everyone in her household. I am sure that it means servants, household staff, and perhaps members of her extended family. But I am also pretty sure it means her children as well. Again, that’s just a guess.

Lydia was an extraordinary woman, especially for that time in history. Lydia was a Greek name, not a Jewish one. She is named after an area which was well known for the manufacture and sale of purple cloth. Purple cloth was used for the garments of the rich and powerful and so it is safe to assume that she was in constant contact with the elite of her society. She was a socially prominent woman, probably a widow, owner of her own home, wealthy, successful.

One Sabbath day, Paul went outside the city of Philippi to a river where there was a prayer meeting going on. This leads me to believe that there was no synagogue in the city, so some folks chose to meet on the banks of a river in a more relaxed and informal setting.

It is also possible that there weren’t ten Jewish males which was the requirement for a quorum in order to have an official worship service. So Paul the rabbi could join this gathering of women, a practice that would have been impossible in other settings.

The Scripture says that Lydia was a “God-fearing woman.” Again, we’re not really sure what that means. Was she a Jew? Was she a Gentile who worshiped the God of the Jews?

What we do know is that God was working in her heart. This is what John Wesley called “Prevenient Grace.” It is the beginnings of God working in the heart of an individual, prompting that person toward fuller faith. So God was working in Lydia until that day when she met Paul. At that point, under his teaching and leadership, she was able to firmly and fully believe in the power of Christ for her salvation. She, along with her entire household, was baptized on the spot.

Now Wesley was clear that Prevenient Grace could be refused. We don’t have to respond to God’s call on our lives. We don’t have to acknowledge his gentle promptings. We don’t have to open ourselves up his power. That is part of what it means to have free will.

There were many reasons for Lydia to be fearful of making the commitment to God and to living for him. Christianity was still new. People were still very suspicious of this

new faith system. Whether she was a Jew or a Gentile, it could become very uncomfortable for her to suddenly go after this new God. Lydia had a choice. She could choose to give in to her fear and so refuse to respond. Or she could choose faith instead. She chose faith.

Let's remember the rest of the story. After her baptism, she said to Paul and his traveling companions, perhaps Silas, Timothy, and Luke, "...come home with me and be my guests."

As time went on, Lydia's house became a place of Christian worship in the city of Philippi. We know that throughout his ministry, Paul had a special place in his heart for this church. When he wrote to them, he said, "You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone" (Philippians 4:15). These people were the ones who were generous, and hospitable, and loving, and faithful. It all started on the banks of the river and in Lydia's living room. It all started because she chose faith instead of fear.

On this Mother's Day, I want to acknowledge the special place that women can have in the spiritual lives of the family and the church. But it is not just women who struggle with fear. Each of us has our own separate, distinct, and unique fear. It is different for each one of us. But I am hoping that we can all take a lesson from Lydia, who managed to put her faith first. She refused to give in to fear. Even though she wasn't sure what the future held, she trusted God.

Today is a special day for another reason. In just a few minutes, we will welcome four young people into the membership of the church. For several months now, they, along with their mentors, have been studying for this day. They have read the gospel of Luke. They had met with me a couple of times to discuss what it means to be a United Methodist. They have been mentored by adults who are established, faithful Christians. These mentors have led by example and have shown what it means to be a Christian in everyday life.

They will renew their baptismal vows and accept for themselves the adult responsibilities of church membership. They will make a public declaration that they have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

This may be a little scary for them. They may be a little afraid. After all, their friends who aren't Christians might give them a hard time. I just said that they will accept adult responsibilities within the life of the congregation. That may be more than a little daunting for them. But they will make their declarations of faith, not out of fear, but out of commitment to Christ and his way of life.

I don't expect them to understand all of this "church membership stuff" right now. It is a process of growing. They will learn and increase in their faith as they continue on in worship, Sunday School, and youth fellowship. They will ask questions, test limits, and look for their own unique way of being a Christian. Today isn't a destination for them. It

is only the beginning of the journey. They will continue to look for those things that God is calling them to be and to do.

I have every confidence that they will face their future with faith. We will all be here for them, even though they may be a challenge from time to time. We do that because we love them and desire the very best for them.

Each of their journeys will be different. God will take each of them down different paths. But I am sure that they will continue to choose faith. As I see it, that is the only choice that makes sense.