**Reflections 25-31 May – Not all plain sailing**

**Bible study on Acts 16:9-15**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Everlasting God, the one who knows all things,
we gather together to bring you praise.
We gather as your people,
knowing that we are often guilty of thinking
we know and can do all things.
Forgive us, Lord, and help us learn afresh today to follow you,
even into unexpected and uncomfortable places.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

**9**During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” **10**After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

**Lydia’s Conversion in Philippi**

**11**From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. **12**From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2016&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27496a)] of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

**13**On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. **14**One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. **15**When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

Paul, Silas and Timothy were frustrated in their plans to travel either south or north, arriving instead in Troas, on the western shore of what is now Turkey. They accept this frustration as the work of the Spirit, and Paul’s vision leads them to set sail for Philippi, in what is now Greece. His companions saw taking the gospel westward as God’s will, emphasised by the sudden shift to the first-person plural: ‘when he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over’. Perhaps Luke himself was present (see Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24), or perhaps the author is stepping into the narrative because his book is also an important witness, proclaiming good news by engaging its readers with these acts of Jesus’ chosen witnesses.

We now hear of the founding of the first church in Europe, through the baptism of Lydia and her household. Lydia is a trader and householder of relatively high social status. She is ‘a God-fearer’, a Gentile who worshipped the God of the Jews, like Cornelius (10:2). Like the centurion who built a synagogue (Luke 7:5), she probably provided the Jewish ‘place of prayer’ in Philippi. She too had travelled from Turkey to Greece, reminding us of the ways in which the Church’s mission was built on the economic, social and religious networks of the Roman Empire.

Lydia’s heart is opened by God, just as the risen Jesus opened the disciples’ hearts and minds (Luke 24:32,45). We note her eager listening, her baptism, and her being judged ‘faithful to the Lord’ by the acceptance of an invitation to her home (v.15). This linking of belief, baptism and table fellowship, established at the first Pentecost (2:37-47), is integral to the commissioning of Paul (9:18-19) and is reiterated with the acceptance of the Gentile Cornelius and his household (10:44-48). It seems likely that Lydia functioned as the first leader of the church in Philippi, meeting in her home. From Paul’s letters, we hear of churches in the houses of Aquila and Priscilla (Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19) and of Philemon, Apphia and Archippus (Philemon 2).

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

God works in unexpected ways. Will we follow God through the unexpected? Paul, expecting to find a group of men in the leading city of the region, found a group of women by a river instead. This group was led by Lydia, an unbaptized Gentile believer, and she was on the edge rather than the centre of the group. Perhaps this group of women was an original Fresh Expression of church! Paul went expecting to offer, but he ended up receiving. What expectations do we have of how God works that perhaps need changing?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*



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**Questions**

* Have you experienced a turbulent journey? How did it feel?
* Has your faith journey been plain sailing – did you expect it to be?
* What opportunities might there be for local business leaders – like Lydia – to be involved with your church?

 **A prayer to end the Bible study**

All-knowing God, go before us this week
and give us grace to see your handiwork.
Travel with us as we go through the ups and downs
that will come our way.
Lead us to be more like Jesus, loving those we meet with an
extravagant and unexpected love.
**Amen**