

Looking for God, Looking for Me  
Acts 16:13-15  
May 16, 2021  
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**Prayer** - God, help us to look. Help us to listen. Help us to find our place in you and then have the courage to stay there to do, be, give, serve, and share the love of Jesus. Amen

## **Message**

Do you know her name? She was a survivor in every sense of the word. She was successful, connected, and maintained a stable income in spite of what they said about her and regardless of what she had to overcome. If you needed to know who was in the know, ask her. If you wanted information about those at the top, ask her. If you were looking for a good story, her's was one of the best. She had much, yet she wanted more. Not more money or status, but meaning and purpose. When she put her head on the pillow at night, she knew there had to be more to this thing called life; more than beating the odds and just surviving. What was it? Where was it? Who was it? Where was her place? Do you know her name? (pause)

Do you know his name? His power, stripped away, was returned to him in his ability to talk to others, his passion to reach people, and his conviction to make a difference. He didn't have much but what he did have he gave away. He was well traveled, well educated, and well accomplished. He had seen and done many things, yet he wanted more. Not for himself but for the One who changed his life. He yearned to do still more. Go farther, reach further, change more lives. Where was he to go next? Where was his place? Do you know his name? (pause)

Two people. Two different pasts. Two life experiences. Both leading to the same question of place and purpose, both ultimately leading to the desire for more. More time. More meaning. More opportunities. More fulfillment.

Who are they? Could it be the person sitting next to you? The neighbor around the corner? The barista at Starbucks or Coffee House Five? Is it you? Do you ever find yourself asking, “is there more to what I have, who I am, what I am doing, or how I am doing it?” Do you wonder what more is out there? What more you could do with what you have? What more God God could do in and through you? What more is waiting for you, your family, your relationships, your money, experience, gifts, and skills?

Their names were Paul and Lydia, and although the answer to the “more” question manifested itself differently for each of them, the exciting, powerful, and beautiful thing about their story is that the answer was found in God. That doesn’t sound like much, but wait til you hear everything that had to happen to pull together and pull off one of history’s greatest faith conversion stories ever!

Remember, when we started this journey with Paul and some of the early apostles, a few weeks ago, their goal was to take the good news of Jesus west to Asia but God closed those doors and then they turned north but that got shut down as well. Then Paul had a dream, remember, of a Macadonian standing on the far shore calling for help. So they changed course and went to Europe. “All the pieces had come together. We knew now for sure that God had called us to preach the good news to the Europeans.” Acts 16:10

There we pick up with our text for today. This small band of apostles crossed the harbor at Troas, went on to a place called Sa-moth-race, then to Ne-apolis, and from there they walked to Philippi. That in and of itself was significant - Philippi was a leading city in the district (NRSV), the main city in that part of Macedonia (MSG). More importantly, Philippi was a Roman colony, a strategic center guarded and ruled by small

bands of Roman military veterans who completed their service but would know the dress, language and laws no matter where they were (Barclay 122-123).

When they arrived, there was no synagogue / church for Paul and the small group of apostles to go to or to use as a base of operation. That meant there weren't even ten male Jewish believers in all of Philippi, which was the number needed to establish a worshipping church, or if there were, they weren't public about it. Most likely, the women were Jewish women married to non-jewish men (Barclay 123). The apostles then, truly were sitting ducks in dangerous waters with no back up, no safe zone, and no inside help. They were surrounded by people who believed in Greek gods / mythology, and lived under Roman rule.

However, where the Jews were unable to have a synagogue, they had a place of prayer and these places were usually by the riverside. Hear then how God brings the desire of Paul to do more alongside the desire of Lydia to know there is more to her belief in the God of the Jews and her place in God's purpose.

Read Text: Acts 16:13-15

There it was! Did you hear it? Could you see it in your mind's eye?

Right there in those three verses God did more than either Lydia or Paul, or us for that matter, could imagine. In those three verses, the good news of Jesus, crossed into Europe - by way of and through the heart of a woman! Paul and the apostles were given a base of operation for the work of the church in one of the most strategic Roman colonies in history. It could literally go out anywhere from there!

Not only that, look at what else happened.

Lydia was not originally from Philippi. She was from the region Thyrtira (thigh-ya-tie-rah), in the province called Lydia, in the country of Asia Minor (isn't that

right next to Asia, where Paul wanted to go in the first place?). The area of Lydia had five large cities: Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Thyatira (thigh-ya-tie-rah), all located on or near the chief rivers and connected with coastal cities by well traveled roads. (All the Women of the Bible 222). She would have had connections all along those major routes, why? Because remember she was a dealer in fine purple cloth. She was a business woman who made and sold fine purple cloth and textiles, a skill only certain women from a certain area knew how to do.

It just gets better. When God does more, it's way more!

The Lydian market, as it was called, had enjoyed for generations a wide and valuable trade throughout the Graeco-Roman world. This woman evidently was so closely allied with her old province of Lydia, that her personal name reflected her connection to the place and the people (All the Women of the Bible 222).

Lydia believed in the God of the Jewish people even though she was not Jewish and she was living in an area where people believed in and worshiped Greek gods, and practiced Roman culture. She knew there had to be more to her faith than following the Old Testament Law and Jewish ways. She wanted more out of her life and her purpose. She wanted to find her place in the work of this God she was putting her faith in.

Paul wanted more for work he and the other apostles were doing; more for the spread of the good news. He knew God was calling him to take the good news of Jesus, that so radically changed his life, to people far and wide.

The power and presence of the Holy Spirit brought it all together so that the good news of Jesus reached more people than even Paul could imagine. Lydia found her place in using her contacts, experience, connections, resources, and knowledge to be the first European convert to Christianity - AND her home became the first meeting place of the first church in Europe located in the city of Philippi!

Could it be that because Lydia was looking for God looking for her that she found her place in God's mission? We are told she believed, became baptized, her and all her household. Then think about how far reaching the possibilities were from there because of the location of Philippi and Lydia's business contacts / connections; roads and trade routes went in every direction from that starting point.

She found her place because she was praying, seeking, and opening herself to the possibility that God was seeking her (N.T. Wright 63) and indeed came to know that God would use her to impact the spread of the good news across the known world.

Finding your place in God's mission is about listening, watching, and waiting for more. It is about seeking more out of your faith and yourself. It is about knowing that God's "more" is far greater than ours if we but seek and trust it. It is about looking for God looking for you and then trusting God to use who you are and what you have.

I wonder how God is using you to reveal God's self - God's love, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness to those around you, to those who need it most. I wonder, are you looking for God looking for you?

In just one week, we will participate in what we call Faith Promise Giving - a special time of year in the life of this church when we commit to giving above what we already have pledged to give to the annual budget, and we give it on faith. The money given goes to support mission and outreach projects and various local ministry connections we have built over the years. We are asking you to consider how you, like Lydia, can use what you have been given to expand the reach of Jesus, trusting that God can and will provide all you need and more.

Thanks be to God, amen.