

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Sunday, November 5, 2023
Festival of All Saints

Thank God for “Lydias”

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, because of our mercy. Amen.

Dear fellow saints of God,

If you look carefully at the hymns we sing today, you will find some key Bible themes that sum up the way Lutheran Christians celebrate All Saints Day.

We remember and thank God for the many believers of the past who have gone before us, those we know and those we don't. As saints of God, they trusted in and served the Lord. Now they enjoy the heavenly victory Jesus won for them.

We also thank the Lord for counting us among His saints. Saint means holy one. All believers in Jesus are holy, only on account of Jesus' saving work that forgives us. Since faith in Jesus is God's gift, we ask the Lord for help to continue to live faith filled lives.

We find these same themes in our second lesson where we hear about a saint of old, a woman named **Lydia**.

Lydia isn't the most famous name in the Bible. She is generally not as well-known as Noah, Moses, Abraham, Sarah, Mary, or Peter. **Lydia's** name is only mentioned twice in the Bible. And yet our lesson makes it very clear that **Lydia** was important to the Lord!

We see that in the way the Holy Spirit introduces us to Lydia: **After we put out to sea from Troas, we sailed straight to Samothrace, and the next day to Neapolis. From there we went to Philippi... On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate alongside the river, where we thought there was a place of prayer. We sat down and began to talk to the women who had gathered there. A woman named Lydia, who worshipped God, was listening. She was a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira.**

Our lesson is part of Paul's Second Missionary Journey, about 20 years after Jesus rose from the dead. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and the author of Acts, Luke were leading the first official mission trip to Europe. There in Greece, in **Philippi**, Lydia was brought to faith in Jesus.

If you break it down, it's stunning to think of how much effort God put in to make Lydia one of His believing people. First there's obviously how the Son of God, Jesus Christ came to live and die and rise to pay for all sin and win eternal life for the world.

Then there's how Jesus took Paul, a former unbeliever who even persecuted the church and hated Christians and made him into arguably the greatest apostle and missionary.

If you dig into the details of Paul's second missionary journey, you'll find out he never planned to go to Philippi or even to Europe for that matter. Instead, the Lord repeatedly upended Paul's travel plans to get that missionary team to sail to cross the sea to Europe and come to Philippi. And then the Lord had also ruled the events of **Lydia's** life we don't even know about to bring her from her home town of **Thyatira** to that river near **Philippi** where Paul would tell her how Jesus is the long-promised Savior of the world.

See how God did all of that, just for her to hear the gospel! But that wasn't all. It took more still, because Lydia, like every human being is born dead in sin and we are God's natural enemies from the very start of life. The Bible repeatedly tells us that makes it impossible to come to faith by our own power, it must be a gift of God.

And so, God's Word says: **The Lord opened her (Lydia's) heart to pay close attention to what Paul was saying.** Lydia did not open her own, heart. God opened it. The Holy Spirit **opened her heart** to believe through the Gospel message Paul proclaimed.

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This is the same truth Jesus spoke of when He told His disciples: **No one can come to me unless the Father... draws him** (John 6) and again: **You did choose me, but I chose you**

(John 15). It's what St. Paul puts like this in 1 Corinthians: **No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit** (12:3) and again in Romans: **Faith comes from hearing the message** (10:17).

In the small Catechism, Martin Luther summed up this Bible truth how faith is a miracle worked by God alone with these words from the explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed: *I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel... sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*

That Luke, the author of Acts so clearly spells out **the Lord opened (Lydia's) heart** led my Greek Professor back in college joke, that St. Luke shows himself to be a Lutheran!

So, we thank God for Lydia's faith! And in so doing, we thank him for the faith of all believers, including you and me, whom God has made saints, believers in Jesus only by His mercy and His powerful Word that **opened our hearts** to believe.

Truly, this means you are important to the Lord! It doesn't matter whether or not you are important or famous or known by human standards, for you are known to the Lord. He cares deeply about you!

After all, just like with Lydia, the Lord ruled countless events of history all so that the message of Jesus's saving work would cross seas and oceans to call you to faith through the Word and Water of baptism!

Yes, God ruled the rise and fall of nations, using pastors, teachers, missionaries, ancestors, saints of old who preached the word, not to mention Christian friends, grandparents, parents all to bring you to hear and learn about Jesus so that the **Lord would open your heart!**

3

As Martin Luther once said, faith in Christ is "busy and active and living." God given saving faith wants to go into action in thanks to God and service to neighbor. And so it was with Lydia: **When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house."**

Lydia's faith led her to support gospel mission work. She asked the mission team to **stay** in her home, to make it their headquarters while they stayed in the city. She was providing them with food and lodging. Her welcoming and generous hospitality meant that the missionaries wouldn't have to work a side job to support their work like they had to do in other cities. They could give their full-time work to proclaiming God's Word to others.

Lydia's good works of supporting the message of Jesus were important to the Lord, because He who removes our every sin and counts us as holy through Jesus is delighted when His Gospel produces such fruit in His peoples' lives!

But Lydia's faith in action was also important because it served others. The end of Acts 16 indicates Lydia had opened up her home to be the place for the brand-new congregation of believers in Philippi to meet for worship and encouragement from God's Word.

Lydia's generosity and support of the gospel seems to have been contagious. The Bible tells us the church in Philippi supported continue to send mission gifts to support Paul's work to spread the gospel in other cities too.

There is a special, almost family like warmth you can sense between Paul and the Philippians when you read the letter he later wrote to them. I like to think that Lydia's welcoming example had much to do with that.

Once again, there's a message here to all of us. You are important to the Lord and how you live as a believer and support the work of His gospel ministry truly matters, even if it is not huge and flashy, but is small, simple and yet important just like what Lydia did.

4

An elderly Christian in a nursing home may think they are unimportant because they can no longer can serve and yet they can do so much simply by praying for the work of the Church, prayers that the Lord will use and answer to carry out His will!

You likely won't be featured on the WELS connection or in the Forward in Christ magazine for faithfully coming to worship and giving thanks to God with your offerings that are proportionate to the way the Lord has blessed you to support the gospel ministry. And yet these things are important to your Lord and He will use them to bring people to hear the gospel hear and around the world so that the Spirit brings people to heaven.

The kindness you show a neighbor may not be as big as Noah building the ark, but you're reflecting the love of Jesus may be what God uses to make that person want to learn about this Jesus you love and worship.

So, **thank God for "Lydias"** for all his everyday believers like you, whom the Lord has equipped to serve Him and His kingdom as you live for Him in your daily callings and how you support the gospel through your prayers, offerings and serving in the congregation.

Of course, on this day when we say 'farewell' to Judy as she retires from the public ministry, let us take a moment to thank God for the ways she has been a **"Lydia"** to bless Peace Lutheran. I see many ways that our Judy is just **Lydia**.

First, like all the saints, we give all thanks to God for Judy, for it was the **Lord** who ruled history to **open Judy's heart** to faith when He made her a child of God in Holy Baptism.

And it was the Lord who gave her the desire to study for the teaching ministry. It was the Lord who put her in all the various places she has served in schools, at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, and here at Peace, not to mention the several other jobs where her faith in Christ led her to serve others, so that living for her Savior she would touch the lives of literal thousands if not tens of thousands by extension!

Like Lydia, the Lord has blessed Judy with a warm and inviting personality and gift for hospitality that has made Peace congregation members, children in the school and center and their families feel welcomed to our campus. She has even welcomed and gotten to know the UPS and Fed Ex Drivers who come to our campus and make sure they always have an invite to our special worship services!

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Just as Lydia supported the gospel work at Philippi and beyond, Judy has supported the gospel ministry here at Peace in obvious ways by women's ministry and women's Bible classes, by assisting with worship music and tireless work with our outreach team.

But she has also served Peace in ways I think the average Peace member might not know, in so many ways behind the scenes.

Judy spent hours working with and assisting the pastors, meeting with and listening to our teachers and spending time encouraging them. She created opportunities for our faculty and staff to fellowship together and did so many other intangible things that the Lord has used to help our called workers be a true ministry team and our congregation to be a church family.

I could go on with many more reason for us to thank the Lord for what He has done through Judy, but we should probably leave something for the special program after 2nd service.

Let me end with three summary points of thanksgiving.

First - **Thank God** for all **Lydias** –for all his saints including you. Thank Him for faith and faith filled lives and faith’s goal – eternal life from our Savior!

Second – Thank God for giving our congregation Judy and blessing us through her over these past years and giving us through her a wonderful example of supporting gospel ministry.

Finally – Let us thank **God for “Lydias”** like Judy by asking Him to help us walk in their footsteps, putting our faith into action, into welcoming Christian love and supporting the gospel ministry so that many more might join us in that endless heavenly celebration thanking God forever more. Amen.

To Jesus who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to Jesus be glory forever and ever! Amen.

Remain seated – Continue with the Hymn – vocalist vs. 2