

OPENER:

However many years ago, online personality quizzes became the best thing on the internet. These quizzes (a clear descendant of women's lifestyle magazine quizzes) are eye-catching and fun to take, with titles like:

“What city should you live in?”

“What *Friends* character are you the most like?”

or “What *Harry Potter* house do you belong in?”

These quizzes are not scientific, of course, but fairly harmless, other than maybe for work productivity.

Recently, I did a personality quiz that asked:

“Which one of Jesus' disciples are you the most like?”

I took 3 separate ones of those and was “St. Andrew” each time.¹

In my first sermon here, I talked about the sails above us, and how they each represent a disciple. But the 12 disciples actually all blend together (beyond maybe Peter and Judas) and they lack diversity.

The disciple quiz, or at least in all the ones that I tried, also have that as their flaw: one has to be a male disciple,.

That having been said, there is a typology of female disciples, lurking in the culture of Christian seminars and conversation, but unfortunately it's a binary one:

it's the classic “are you a *Mary* or are you a *Martha*?”

That choice comes from the story where Jesus visits the home of Martha and, while they were there, Mary “sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying” while Martha “was distracted by her many tasks.”

Jesus declares that Mary “has chosen the better part.”²

This division of women's roles—into either spiritual values or to the material concerns of the world—is not, of course, what Jesus meant.

But sometimes that is what ends up happening: women are pigeon-holed into those two types: the contemplative and spiritual Mary VS. the hard-working but distracted Martha.

¹ <https://churchleaders.com/daily-buzz/248447-disciple-take-short-quiz-find.html> ; [Which of the 12 Disciples Are You Most Like? | HowStuffWorksQuiz: Which Of Jesus' Disciples Are You, Based On Your Personality? - Quiz-Bliss.com](#)

² Luke 10:38-42.

ACTS of the APOSTLE:

Luckily, our reading from the Acts of the Apostles delivers another example in the person of a woman named Lydia.

Today we heard how Lydia combines the roles of Mary and Martha, she provides spiritual care **and** wisdom along with lodging and hospitality. She is a woman who does both of those things,

She is therefore, as my wife said, when I was describing the outlines of this sermon to her... how Lydia is both Mary and Martha, she said:

“Oh, so you mean she is like most women.”

In another cliché of gender relations, Lydia’s big moment in the Christian story comes about because Paul and his lieutenants, having followed a vision and crossed the sea, promptly get lost and don’t know quite where they are or where they are supposed to be. They seem to have refused to do what so many men have done over the centuries: stop and ask for directions.

In their defense, the Holy Spirit blows where it will! Picture a map of the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Paul had this dream where a “Man of Macedonia” urges him to cross the sea from modern-day Turkey into Europe and preach the Gospel there.

But when they get there, Paul and his followers are kind of just wandering around in a new environment, perhaps a hostile one to Paul’s message, with no clear direction or sign of where to go.

LYDIA:

Into that vacuum of confusion, Lydia fills the void and becomes an agent of the Holy Spirit. Lydia is an unlikely source of help on so many levels. She is a woman in the 1st century, she is probably a widow, she is a Gentile living in a strange land. But she had the most important attribute: she had an open heart willing to listen to God.

She had an open heart willing to listen to Paul’s testimony,
she had an openness ready to have been baptized,
and an openness that opens up her household to Paul and his followers.

The final line: “And she (Lydia) prevailed upon us”³ is revealing.

³ Used only one other time in the Bible, in the Emmaus story (Luke 24.29) where the disciples prevail upon Jesus to stay at their house.

In ancient culture, as in today, there would have been this back and forth where Paul, the guest, would have declined the kind offer to stay, and Lydia would have again offered to “pick up the check” and to put them up. You can imagine them going back and forth a few times before Paul relents, thanking his lucky stars that he found this saint in this foreign land.

IRONIES:

So ironies and deep truths—about gender, about geography, and most importantly about God—abound in this story.

Paul had been sent to see a Man in Macedonia but instead he meets a Women from Lydia (the region in Asia Minor he just left) named Lydia, who shows him the way. Lydia became the first Christian convert in Europe, the first to be baptized there. From this seemingly haphazard encounter between Paul and Lydia, we see how the Christian mission was reversing the military path of Alexander the Great, who also originated in Macedonia. It was setting the spread of Christianity on a collision course on the road to Rome.

From Europe, Christianity would, of course, spread all throughout the world.

We here this story in the Easter season, where we are learning how the disciples responded to the Resurrected Christ, with all of our lessons are pointing to the next great big Feast of the Church, Pentecost, where we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit and we think about God’s mission on this earth, to spread the Gospel to its four corners, in all different languages, to all different peoples.

Our story articulates how the Holy Spirit works in surprising and unexpected ways. How God turns mustard seeds, and unleavened bread, fig trees, and widowed textile workers into the builders of the Kingdom of God.

ST. TIMOTHY’S

And, luckily, we don’t need to look all the way back to Lydia to see these sorts of example.

Just last week, we had our bilingual service here with our Spanish speaking congregation and I heard the liturgy afresh in a language that I don’t understand, but in a community that I am beginning to understand, and already love.

Yesterday, I presided over an Episcopal funeral for Marcia Andere, a Jamaican-American who was a pillar of this church for many years, but I had help from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Christian Church in Reston, a progressive Black Church; I

sat on the altar next to a Lutheran pastor. We had Episcopal hymnody next to Gospel music from the African-American church, a Zoomed in homily from visiting clergy next to our ancient liturgy.

Another word about gender: Our Men's Group here at St. Timothy's is called **MOST: Men Of St Timothy's**

What does that make our women? "**LEAST**"? FAR FROM IT!

There are so many Lydias, so many Mary's, so many Martha's, so many Marcia's who do so much of the work here. When I think about these sails and our church, I think about all of the female navigators and helmswomen, and rowers etc. that make this church happen.

I wonder, actually, if the burden is too heavy. On the women, but on all of us. My sense, garnered from the short time that I have been here, is that there are many here who need a rest. Some of you, I have said that to your face, with the caveat that I don't know what I would do without you.

Because of COVID, because of where we are, all of our ministries are in need of new folks. Some might need new people at the top, some might need Mary and Martha. You also might be Paul in this story, you might be in need of rest and spiritual refreshment.

CONCLUSION:

Back to Lydia's role, her role in the story is minor, in a sense, she features only in this one chapter in the Bible. She shows up only one more time, when Paul gets out of jail, where do you think he goes? You can picture Lydia opening up her house again to the weary missionaries.

Lydia sets the pattern, where God's mission reveals itself as more inclusive, more broad, more surprising than we can imagine. When there seems to be barriers and impediments, the Holy Spirit shows us the way.

In our personal lives, and in our life as the Church, we are sometimes prevented from going along the path that we expected, and instead have to take a detour to uncharted lands.

In that journey, we know that the Holy Spirit is guiding us and that there will be countless 'Lydia's' along the way to help us, to show us the way, to provide hospitality for us, and to help us learn about the Risen Christ.

AMEN