

*Life is a Mission Trip*  
*Acts 16:11-15, 40*  
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Turn with me to Acts 16:11. We're reading from the middle of what's been called "Paul's 2nd missionary voyage;" he's sharing the good news of Jesus, accompanied by Silas and Timothy. This map helps us visualize how **good news comes to town through apostles**, those sent out on a mission from God.

*<sup>11</sup>From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis.*

*<sup>12</sup>From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.*

After a nice boat ride from Asia Minor to Europe, they walked across northern Greece to Philippi, where retired Roman soldiers built nice Italian villas. Verse 13 tells us how **good news comes to Lydia**...

*<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God.*

Normally the apostles went first to announce to Jews that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. Apparently Philippi didn't yet have a synagogue (the Law required that there be ten male leaders of Jewish households). So on the Sabbath a handful of Jewish women gathered for prayer by the river. They were joined by God-fearing Gentiles like Lydia. She was apparently a widow and in the business of selling luxury clothing.

God-fearers had turned from idol worship and put their trust in the one true God, without becoming fully Jewish. These God-fearers were very receptive to the Gospel. Look at the last part of verse 14, as the **good news comes into Lydia's heart**...

*The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*

God had prepared Lydia for this moment. Losing her husband had likely made her more dependent on God. Through the Jewish scriptures she came to know the gracious God who liberated people from darkness and brought them into His light. And she awaited the Messiah. When Paul told her of Jesus, crucified and raised in power, she believed, which is the work of the Holy Spirit's persuasion in a person's spirit. To be believed, the Spirit of God confirms the truth of God's Word in peoples' hearts. This is a wonderful mystery.

Then the **good news comes to Lydia's family**...verse 15 says, *When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home*...implying that this happened right there in that river, on that very day. In chapter 16, verse 32, we read of the Philippian jailer becoming a believer...

*<sup>32</sup>Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup>At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.*

When the good news comes to town, it comes to individual people, who then take it home. The Gospel wasn't just for them, but for their families. Since Lydia and this jailer were the heads of their families, their

immediate impulse was to baptize everyone in their families—including the children and the servants. This is why Presbyterians encourage families to baptize their children, anticipating the day when children confirm their identity in Christ.

The Gospel isn't just for Christian families; it is shared through Christian households. Acts 16: 15 shows how the **good news** which came first through apostles, now **comes to town through Lydia's household**.

*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.*

It wasn't too hard to persuade them to stay; a seller of purple cloth probably had a decent place to live. But there's another reason. In ancient times every household had lots of connections: the servants and their families... business associates and their families... friends at Roman social clubs. We're talking about Italian families!

Whenever these apostles enjoyed the hospitality of these new believers, the heads of the household invited those in their social networks to eat with these apostles, to hear this wonderful message about the true God who sent His only Son in order to bring people into His family. Those who believed would be baptized and begin to worship the true God in their household. Look at verse 40, at the end of chapter 16:

*<sup>40</sup>After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.*

This little story ends with the city of Philippi having a church. Gathering at Lydia's house was her family, the jailer's family, a liberated fortune-telling slave girl, and whoever else welcomed the Gospel of grace. The chapter ends saying *then they left*; the apostles could leave Philippi because they had planted the church in these households. Before they left they usually appointed elders from the Christian households of each city, to give spiritual oversight to the house churches (Titus 1:5). But amazingly they left the sharing of Gospel in the hands of new believers!

These insights have been the focus of my doctoral studies. I've learned about how the church was **missional**; not as something you do, but an adjective, something you are. The church didn't just support missions or send missionaries somewhere else—Christ-followers understood that they were a missionary movement in a mission field. For hundreds of years, they shared the Gospel effectively without buildings... without elaborate organizations... without programs... without professional clergy doing everything—the "professionals" got them started, gave them training, set up accountability and left.

I didn't conclude that we should sell the buildings, disband the organization, dismantle the programs, or (gulp) get rid of the trained professionals! But I have a renewed vision for how all this stuff should serve God's Kingdom, how the church is a people, and how our network of relationships can become the main way we share the Gospel.

Don't limit your ministry to Trinity's programs. It's **artificial** to say "I'm going to church" when you come to this campus. The church is an organism, wherever Christ-followers are, there's the church. The church's ministry should be **organic**, growing where God makes it happen. 638 South Patrick Drive is where a large church family gathers for worship and preparation. God's reign happens everywhere naturally.

As the good news came to town through Lydia's household, God wants to use our whole network of relationships: our neighbors, classmates, "3rd place" friends we meet where we "hang out," our co-workers, our business associates, our leisure pursuit buddies, our partners in charity, and of course, the persons we reach out to help. Kim informs me that 91 people filled out Community Impact surveys, 83 different organizations were blessed by these 91 persons. It is mind boggling how many people are touched by this church.

In recent weeks many of us have made efforts to notice people and practice kindness. An outsider to our church told one of our folks that a stranger let her move up in the line at the Sprint store; she was told, "My church is teaching me to show God's love in a practical way." Outflow!

One of our high school students realized that God was telling her to go sit next to one of the "special needs" students; she ate lunch with him.

Over a several year period, several of our staff members befriended a waitress; they know all about her and her family. The other day she gave them an envelope for Trinity's offering plate—part of her tax refund.

One of our members was talking to single mother who's a cashier at a Wal-Mart. In a moment of vulnerability she said, "I don't have any friends." She was told "I'll be your friend," and invited her and her child to share a meal. The friendship has continued, and with it, a network of Christ-followers. Her Life Group have provided financial assistance, food, and transportation support, they've helped her set up her computer and printer, and are tutoring her as she takes college courses on-line.

And one of our members, remembering what it was like to be homeless, realized that she was strong enough now to go back into the deep woods of Wickham Park, with another friend, taking the things people need when they camp to survive... she knows just what to get them.

None of this ministry was planned by staff, nor did they take place on campus. They were organic--the church fostering spiritual growth wherever God germinates it! Instead of waiting to go on mission trips, they've discovered that life itself is a mission trip!

In our parking lot there's a palmetto palm that's not supposed to be there—a huge weed. At a workday ten years ago, it was 18" high. I pulled at it, but I couldn't get it out. My how it's grown! Some things aren't planned; they just happen...if the professionals don't uproot them!