

**Riverside United Church**  
**July 28, 2024**

Offered by - Jeannie Taylor

**Scripture Reading:** Acts 16: 13-15

On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.

14A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.

15When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

**Reflection: "The Colour Purple"**

This story is by Allison Lynn, from the book *Kindness Matters*. It is called "The Purple Coat."

*Allison had been at church all week, helping set up tables for the annual rummage sale. She says the church was her second home, a respite from the pressures and busyness of university life. In church she felt loved and accepted for who she was.*

*The morning of the rummage sale she arrived early to make coffee for all the volunteers. The treasure hunters were already lined up outside the door to get the best bargain. Allison didn't get a shopping break till late morning, when most of the good stuff had already been sold.*

*The coat caught her eye right away. She could see herself wearing it on a winter's eve, with snow falling softly around her. It was a cape-like, full length, royal purple, with a plush, faux-fur collar and cuffs. But why had such a beautiful coat not already been scooped up by the shoppers?*

*Allison tried it on and immediately knew she wanted to buy it. Until she looked at the price tag. The coat was listed at full designer price! At a rummage sale!*

*"Is this correct?" she asked the volunteer. "Yes, isn't it ridiculous?" she replied. "Mrs. Sharp said she would only donate it if it could bring a very large donation for the church. She's the one who set the price."*

*Allison couldn't believe it. Rummage sales are usually places where single parents, students and pensioners come to find bargains. This seemed to go against the spirit of the occasion. She was angry at Mrs. Sharp, who she knew was quite wealthy. Allison knew she couldn't afford it, so reluctantly, she put the coat back. Throughout the day, others also looked at the coat but walked away when they saw the price tag.*

*At the end of the day, the volunteer from the coat table came up to Allison with a large garment bag draped over her arm. Puzzled, Allison unzipped the garment bag only to find the beautiful purple coat.*

*"For you", said the volunteer. "It's a gift. When Mrs. Sharp came to the table, we had to explain that nobody could buy the coat because of the price. She asked if anyone had been particularly fond of it, and I told her about you.*

*Mrs. Sharp said 'I remember the day I got this coat when I was just a young woman. Draped in the purple splendour, I felt like a queen, like I could take on the world. This coat and I have made a lot of memories together.' Then she took out her wallet and gave us the amount on the price tag. She said, 'This needs to be worn by someone who will truly appreciate it, someone who will create lots of extraordinary memories wearing it.'"*

*Allison couldn't believe it. Not only had Mrs. Sharp paid for her own coat, but now she wanted Allison to have it. Her stomach twisted into a knot when she realized that in this place where she had received so much love and acceptance, she had been so quick to judge someone else. She was overwhelmed by Mrs. Sharp's overflowing grace and generosity.*

*She gathered the soft purple folds into her arms. She knew it would keep her warm and be a joyful flash of colour on a grey day, and they would create lots of memories together.*

*Allison learned a powerful lesson that day: People aren't always who you think they are. Be slow to anger. Be slow to judge. And when, given the chance, be outrageously generous. Be boldly and unapologetically kind. Surprise others with your compassion and goodness. You never know who you might bless in the process.*

Many of us have been blessed by the women in our lives. Some who are very close to us, and some who we barely know. I was a member of Emmanuel United Church for 24 years, and during that time there were several women who mentored me and helped me find my calling as a Lay Worship Leader. Women like the late Ann Squire, who was the first lay woman to become Moderator of the United Church of Canada, and Christine Williams who was our Lay Minister and encouraged me to participate in Mission Learning Trips and come back and tell the stories.

There were others who encouraged me along the way to. I graduated as a Licenced Lay Worship Leader in 2015, and I have now led worship over 150 times in 30 different churches in Eastern Ontario and Quebec. I never dreamed I would have the opportunity to share my faith by leading worship with a lot of great music directors, choristers and lay people and meet so many wonderful United Church people along the way. And it is all because of some great women mentors.

In the passage from Acts that Mary Shaw read, we meet Lydia. Lydia was a businesswoman who lived in Philippi, which was a city that was known for its fine textiles. Lydia and her staff created expensive purple cloth, which they made with a dye they got from certain shellfish found only in the Mediterranean region. Purple cloth was a statement of status, power, and wealth in Roman times. Still today we believe the colour purple has the balance of red's stimulation and blue's calming properties. It is traditionally associated with royalty, majesty, and nobility as well as having a spiritual or mysterious quality.

Lydia had a fine home where her employees and servants lived, and she even had a room for guests. She was a believer in God, and since there was no synagogue in Philippi, every Sabbath day she and her friends would gather by the River Zygactis to pray. She was familiar with the Hebrew scriptures, but she didn't know about Jesus. Jesus had lived in Israel, and she was in Macedonia. They didn't have TV or Facebook to find out what was going on in other parts of the world, so they had to learn about things from people travelling through town.

Paul was an apostle of Jesus. He believed that Jesus had a lot to teach us about love, peace, and justice. He and his friends Silas, Timothy and Luke were travelling around, preaching the gospel and baptizing people in the Holy Spirit. One day they came to Philippi and found Lydia and her friends worshipping beside the river. Paul started talking about Jesus, and, as we are told, the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. So, Paul took Lydia down to the river to be baptized, and she invited the rest of her household to come and be baptized as well.

Afterwards Lydia said, "now we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. You must be hungry and tired from travelling. Please come to my house for some food and rest." Paul's heart was opened too, and in this passage we find proof that the barriers between Jew and gentile, female and male, are passing away.

Paul and his followers went to Lydia's house to share a meal, and they became friends. When she took them into her house, she created one of the first home churches in Europe. Lydia became one of the leaders of the

Christian church in Philippi, and Paul went on to share the good news and baptize many other people along the way.

Lydia was a wise, kind, and generous woman with a strong faith.

I'm sure we can all think of women who have had a positive influence on our lives. So today we give thanks for Lydia and all the mother figures, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, and friends who have been part of our lives.

This is an adaptation of a poem by Maya Angelou:

*I have so much I can teach her  
And pull out of her.  
I would say you might encounter defeats  
But you must never be defeated  
I would teach her to love a lot.  
Laugh a lot at the silliest things  
And be very serious.  
I would teach her to love life,  
I could do that.*

May we always be grateful for the women who have shared their time, advice, and encouragement with us, and may we be there to teach others to love life too.

Amen.