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“Come and stay at my home” (Acts 16:15).

Acts 16:11-15; John 15:26b—16:4a

The Acts of the Apostles is really Volume II of Luke’s Gospel, and in many ways it repeats the story of Jesus in the lives of the Apostles. They do many of the things that Jesus did, including preaching and healing and facing opposition. Even the scenes where they emerge from locked jail cells recall Jesus’ emergence from the tomb. Nothing can stop the spread of the Good News.

In today’s reading, Paul finds hospitality with the woman named Lydia in Thyatira. He has been run out of other cities in Asia Minor, been stoned, jailed and threatened by both officials in the Jewish synagogues and by other Jewish Christians who object to his mission of welcoming Gentiles into the church. As Jesus found respite in Bethany at the home of Martha and Mary, Paul is welcomed by Lydia, a wealthy dealer in purple cloth.

Paul finds her and a group of women outside the city gathered by the river. Perhaps they were a book club or a prayer group of women excluded from other male-dominated temples. Paul’s words touch her heart and she asks to be baptized along with her household. She then invites Paul to stay with them. So much like Jesus, whose words moved people to want to be with him. Paul is living the reality of Jesus’ continued presence in the Spirit as the church reaches beyond its Jewish beginnings into the Roman World.

Luke’s two-volume Gospel is sometimes described as an hourglass on its sides. First, everything focused on Jesus going to Jerusalem, where the events of his death and resurrection occurred. From that focus, the mission of Jesus then expanded into the world through his church, an ever-widening circle of spiritual power beginning its advance to the ends of the earth.

We are part of that ministry, extensions of the work of Jesus through the members of his body. His life, death and resurrection in us touches the hearts of those who see our witness and hear the voice of the Spirit of Jesus in our words. Our Easter season is already moving to the Ascension and Pentecost. We may wonder if we are up to the task, if our efforts will have any effect on our troubled, divided and afflicted world. If so, we are no different than the first disciples who huddled in the upper room awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was clear to his disciples that things would not be easy. They would face opposition. But the Advocate would speak through them. This was not about their fears or limitation; it was God's mission in them, and everything they needed would be provided. Including, perhaps, the hospitality of Lydia and the moments of grace at every crossroads and by every river, where the world is waiting to hear Good News.

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