

Open Doors: Welcome!

Acts 16:9-15

May 9, 2010

First, let me say a word of welcome to all of the mothers who are present this morning. I hope you haven't had to do too much to get your families to come to church with you this morning and that you haven't had to do too much of the planning on behalf of being recognized by those who love you.

I've used this one before and I wasn't going to use it this year but when the thought came to me this past week to greet you with the words I just used I decided it would be appropriate this morning.

It happened in a home where the mother was a stay-at-home one. She went to a PTA meeting one night partially as an excuse to get out of the house and partially because she really did want to be supportive of the PTA and its efforts on behalf of her children.

Her husband and oldest daughter got together and decided that they would clean up the kitchen for her. They put away all the food, wiped down the counters, washed all the pots and pans and put them away, put the dishes in the dishwasher and turned it on. They swept and mopped the floor and then sat down, overcome by their own nobility, and awaited her arrival home from the meeting.

Two hours later she returned from the meeting, took off her coat, hung it up, walked through the kitchen into the den, picked up the remote control, and began watching television. The husband and daughter followed her to her chair and stood by her side. Finally she felt them looking over her shoulder and looked up at them and asked, "What?"

The husband said, "The kitchen."

"The kitchen, what?" she responded.

"The kitchen. We cleaned up the kitchen. Didn't you notice? It's sparkling clean. We cleaned it for you."

The woman looked at the two proud members of her family and replied, "Yes, I noticed. Thankless job, isn't it?"

Judith Viorst once wrote an essay based on interviews she had with children. The subject of her essay was "What's a good mother like?"

Viorst reported in the essay that most children expect their mothers to get angry from time to time. Young Ted for example noted, "She has to or she'll faint from holding it in."

She quoted Randy as observing, "But it's best to remember that when your mother starts to act real weird, you have to look scared and serious. Don't giggle. When mommies are mad, they get madder if you giggle."<sup>1</sup>

Viorst included in her essay an account shared by Megan of a time her mom got so mad that she yanked a plate right off the table and mashed potatoes flew into the air. When Judith quizzed Megan about the incident, Megan said, "Well, she told my older brother, Mike – he's 11 – to eat the potatoes on his plate and he said, 'Later.' And then she told him again to eat the potatoes and he said, 'Soon.' And then she told him that he had

better eat those potatoes right now and he said, 'In a minute.' And then she stood up and Mike finally took a bite and told her, 'How can I eat them? They're cold!'"<sup>2</sup>

Joan Torello notes that her mother is notorious for her lead foot. Therefore she was not at all surprised when she learned that a Georgia State Trooper pulled her mother over for speeding as she passed through the state on her way home from Florida.

Hoping to get off with a warning, Joan's mother tried to appear shocked when the officer walked up to her car. "I have never been stopped like this before," she said to the officer.

He responded with, "What do they usually do, ma'am, shoot out your tires?"<sup>3</sup>

Well, I better stop or some mothers might start asking for equal time. I think it's neat that the Acts text for this morning deals with a woman. Now, the scriptures don't tell us whether she was a mother or not, but the fact that she is a woman alone makes this an appropriate story for today. Paul's going to Macedonia and meeting Lydia in Philippi, her getting turned on to the faith and inviting Paul and those with him to her home is another significant story in the development of the church. It's a story of doors being opened. But, I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

Carlyle Fielding Stewart began the chapter on Lydia in his book Deformed, Disfigured, and Despised with this observation: "One of the great problems of our time particularly in some clergy circles is the myopic, antiquated, sexist, provincial, and prejudiced view that some pastors and congregations have regarding women in the church. This problem is particularly acute in regards to female clergy and those strong, anointed, and gifted women of God whom God has appointed and anointed for service and who also pose a threat to the fragile egos of those 'true believers' who deem them unfit and unworthy to be true servants of God. We see this ignorance manifested in such foolish statements as, 'God did not call women to preach. If the Lord had wanted women to serve in his church he would have called women disciples.'"<sup>4</sup>

For the life of me I have no idea where folks get such a view of women and the church. It certainly isn't from the Bible. Peppered throughout the book of our faith are stories of how women were regarded by Jesus, Paul and other apostles and disciples. There's no question that in the early church women played significant roles in its vitality and growth. Lydia was one of them.

Paul and his traveling buddy, Silas, were considering where to go next when young Timothy surfaced. Timothy was a wonderful addition to the team. His mother was Jewish and his father was Greek thus lending an even further witness of the appropriateness of the gospel for Jew and Gentile.

The team was considering going into Asia Minor but something happened to cause Paul to sense that the Holy Spirit was not in favor of that being their next move. Paul then had a vision of a man saying to him, "Come on over to Macedonia and help us." So, believing the vision to be an inspiration provided by the Holy Spirit, they do just that – arriving in Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi.

They spend a few days in the city and when the Sabbath day arrives they seek a worshipping body. Now, there was no synagogue in Philippi, perhaps because there weren't ten Jewish men in the city as required as the minimum for a synagogue. Wherever the Jews were unable to have a synagogue there was usually a designated place of prayer in the community – and these places were usually down by the riverside. Paul and his friends

heard that there was such a group in Philippi and went to pray with them. There they struck up a conversation with the women who were there.

Lydia was one of the women. She was a sincere, wealthy businesswoman – a “God-fearer,” that is, a woman who worshipped God. The things Paul and the others shared with her and her friends got to her and her faith was strengthened and deepened and the church of Europe was born as a result. She is referred to in Bible commentaries as the first European convert. The door to Europe was opened because of the deepened faith of a woman at the top of the social scale. She was a purple-merchant dealer. The dye used to color fabric purple was extracted from sea shells thus making it an extremely expensive color of material.

This story about Lydia is important for a number of reasons. I’ve already mentioned that it signifies the opening of the door to Europe. But it is also significant because it reminds us that the gospel is not just for the poor. To be sure, there are times when I perhaps overemphasize God’s preference for the poor. But one of the things Lydia’s story should remind us of is just how true the scripture text is that observes that the Gospel is meant for everyone – Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women, and yes the poor and the rich. All are welcome.

Another remarkable aspect of Lydia’s story is there is no mention of a husband. Bible commentators believe this to be significant because it means she was the head of the household. What Lydia did after her encounter with Paul’s people down by the riverside was she invited them to her home, not just to rest, but to establish her home as the house church in Philippi.<sup>5</sup>

The door to Europe was opened because Paul was willing to believe the Holy Spirit’s direction to try a new place and a devout woman was willing to open the door to her heart and mind to the gospel message and then open the door to her home so that others might come to know the good news as well.

One of the things we need to be about as the church in our day is opening as many doors as possible to allow people access to the good news. In a sermon by Leonard Sweet he asked: “What can we do today to give people easier access to the church?” Then he offered:

- We may need to cut a few more doors for single parents, or victims of abuse, or gender-related activities, or latchkey children, or grief-and-loss victims.
- We can cut a new door by starting a tutoring program and linking our talented and concerned adults with neighborhood schoolchildren.
- We can cut a new door by using media in worship for a culture which is image and icon, not text and translations.
- We can cut a new door by studying our community, and finding out if there are hidden racial or cultural groups that are not currently being served by any church. We can open our doors to them, but only if we first discover who they are.<sup>6</sup>

And he continued with: “No part of our program should be closed to the spiritual seekers around us, closed by tradition or schedule or esoteric ecclesiastical language. No part of our message should keep anyone from entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ, the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth. No part of the life of the church should stand in the way of anyone being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

And he closed with: “Sometimes the doors that are needed already exist. If a teenager is turned off by the front door of worship, maybe we need simply to unlock the side door of the youth group. If a single person is intimidated by large numbers of couples with children, maybe we need to open the back door of a small group mission project. If an aging widow is unable to drive herself anymore, then certainly we need to provide her with another person’s car door to get her to the church door.”<sup>8</sup>

The church’s ministry is about both opening new doors and unlocking existing ones. To whom should the doors to the church be open? All. All are welcome.

Let us pray.

1. “All in the Family,” 29 December 1991, <http://www.fpcy.org/sermons/12242000.htm>.
2. Ibid.
3. <http://www.ccpc.bowiemd.org/documents/20060423DoubtVirus.doc>.
4. Carlyle Fielding Stewart, Deformed, Disfigured, and Despised (Lima: CSS Publishing Company, 2000), 0-7880-1716-0.
5. Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Tasks for the Living God,” Preaching and Reading from the Old Testament: With An Eye to the New (Lima: CSS Publishing, 2003), 0-7880-1943-0.
6. Leonard Sweet, “The Bag Lady Nightmare,” [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com), 5//13/2007.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.