

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5: *John's vision of the New Jerusalem, where the gates are never closed, but no evil can enter. God's security and hospitality are offered to the nations.*

And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day - and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

John 14:23-29: *Jesus promises the gift of the Holy Spirit – God making God's home within those who love God.*

Jesus said, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

COCU 36C Readings

Last week's readings challenged us to bring life to others through following Christ's example of love. This week, the readings call us to embody that love as hospitality. If anything expresses the life that is unleashed through the Easter event, it is when we learn to see Christ in the stranger, and welcome them into our lives and hearts. Hospitality is the model of how God works in those who love God, and of the life which flows from it. In Acts, Lydia, the new convert, immediately understands that a life of following Christ is a life of hospitality - and offers hospitality to Paul and friends. In Psalm 67, all nations are invited into God's mercy, security and provision - a vision of adoration for God's hospitality. In Revelation, the vision of the New Jerusalem is one of God's hospitality offered to all nations, providing security, healing and food. In the Gospel, the vision is beautifully reversed - God, by God's Spirit, seek to enjoy the hospitality of the human heart, coming to indwell us, and then lead us into lives of obedient love.

Global Application: A vision of a hospitable world is a vision of hope, and also a challenge to the ways in which we fall short of this ideal. Our world has developed a culture of suspicion and inhospitality. But, arguably the primary characteristic of Jesus' first followers as they sought to live out the Gospel was hospitality, reflected in feeding the hungry (current equivalent: global debt relief and removal of unjust trade restrictions?), inviting strangers into their homes (current equivalent: humane and just responses to refugees and asylum seekers?), and serving and praying for the sick, the widow and the orphan (current equivalent: equitable health care and social care?). For those of us who seek to follow Christ, our vote, and our voice in public dialogue, on these key issues are a significant influence in creating a more hospitable world.

Local Application: Hospitality is the essential challenge of the Gospel. Matthew Fox, in his book *Original Blessing*, suggests that the true meaning of "holiness" is hospitality. Hospitality is, essentially, the offer of safety, comfort, nourishment and friendship to both friend and stranger. The Scriptures show that this is a high ideal in God's purposes. It means an opening of our hearts to welcome the stranger and friend, offering safety, comfort and love. Then, this must overflow into practical hospitality, opening our communities, our churches, our neighbourhoods and, yes, even our homes, to those who need shelter, nourishment, safety, acceptance and friendship. How, in your church and its worship, can you become more welcoming and more hospitable to those who are homeless and friendless? (*John van de Laar, Sacredise*)

Psalm 67: *An invitational psalm encouraging all the nations to praise God, to enjoy God's mercy and receive God's provision.*

May God be gracious to us and bless us;

may God's face shine upon us, Selah

that your way may be known upon earth,

your saving power among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; **let all the peoples praise you.**

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,

for you judge the peoples with equity

and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

Let the peoples praise you, O God; **let all the peoples praise you.**

The earth has yielded its increase; **God, our God, has blessed us.**

May God continue to bless us; **let all the ends of the earth revere God.**

Acts 16:9-15: *Paul has a vision, and he and his companions go to Macedonia, where they preached to a group of women in Philippi. Lydia, from Thyatira (thus, a foreigner) was one of those who received the Gospel message. She immediately offers hospitality to Paul and his friends. Paul's visit to Macedonia represents the introduction of Christianity to the European continent.*

During the night Paul had a vision: a man of Macedonia stood pleading with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. 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. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper 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. When 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.

Paul was on his second missionary journey when he had a vision of a man pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" He and his team quickly set off across the Aegean Sea for Macedonia, the northern region of modern-day Greece. When they arrived, they passed through the port of Neapolis and headed straight for Philippi, "a city of Macedonia's first district

and a Roman colony". The group had already spent a few days in the city (probably organising accommodation and work). On the Sabbath day, they went outside the city gates in search of a Jewish place of prayer by a river. Many diaspora Jewish communities (i.e. Jews who lived outside of Judea and Galilee) preferred having their places of prayer outside the city, and near a body of water to facilitate ritual washings. Philippi did not have a recognised synagogue. Perhaps they did not have enough Jewish men to form a quorum necessary for a synagogue (requiring 10 men). But they did have a *proseuchē* (Greek: a prayer-house). Paul and his companions may have been surprised to see a group made up of only, or mainly, women at the prayer-house, including Lydia, a woman originally from Thyatira, who would become a significant leader in the church at Philippi. Lydia is identified as a "God-worshipper"/"God-fearer", a Gentile adherent to Judaism rather than a full convert. In the first decades of the church's existence, almost all Christian converts were either Jews or Gentiles with some kind of affiliation or sympathy with Judaism. Paul baptised Lydia, and her household.

Many women in the 1st century Roman world, like Lydia, were entering the public sphere in business and as patrons. She sold textiles dyed purple. It was only the wealthy elite who wore garments dyed purple or trimmed with purple, or had soft furnishings in their homes, such as couch covers, dyed purple. Tyrian purple, a dye derived from marine molluscs, was especially costly. The expenses involved as a merchant of luxury textiles indicates Lydia was a woman of wealth. She seems to have been the owner and mistress of her own home which was large enough to accommodate Paul and his group as well as her own household. Her home was also used for meetings. Lydia's hospitality and her benefaction of Paul and his ministry required courage. Having a group of foreign men stay in her house might potentially cause scandal. Hosting meetings where they worshipped a new Jewish messiah, and not an emperor or any of the ancient and socially-respectable pagan gods, could have ruined her reputation and her business. Receiving Paul and Silas into her home after they were released from prison and asked to leave town was brave. Paul and his party may have spent several weeks staying with Lydia (*cf. Luke 10:5-7*). During that time, she would have received (directly and indirectly) a theological and pastoral education from Paul so that she was equipped to care for the church when Paul continued on his missionary journey. She seems to have been a spiritually receptive person and it is probable the Spirit gave her spiritual gifts and abilities to help her in ministry

(Margaret Mowczko, <http://www.fixinghereyes.org/single-post/2017/11/29/Lydia-of-Thyatira-The-foreign-woman-who-became-the-foundation-member-of-the-Philippian-Church>)