



## **The First One Ever**

Acts 16:11-15

Mother's Day, May 8, 2022 – Aledo UMC

Rev. Dr. David R. Schultz

### **Scripture:**

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

<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 from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptized, 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.

### **Sermon:**

History was made in San Francisco on Tuesday, April 12 at Oracle Park when the San Diego Padres baseball club came to San Francisco to take on their archrivals, the Giants.

The Giants were already up 4 to 1 in the third inning when first base coach Antoan Richardson was ejected from the game. Manager Gabe Kapler then called on Alyssa Nakken

to take his place, making Alyssa Nakken the first woman in the history of Major League Baseball to coach on the field in a regular season major league baseball game.

Alyssa is 31 and is married to Robert Abel. She has been a part of the Giants organization since 2014, when she started as an intern in baseball operations. She now serves as a major league assistant coach on manager Gabe Kapler's staff. In the past, she's worked on outfield and base-running instruction; in January, 2020, she became the first woman to hold a full-time coaching position in Major League Baseball.

"I feel it's my job to honor those who have helped me get to where I am," she told MLB.com not long after ascending to that position. "Coaching, I never saw it. This job has kind of been hidden for so long. I'm so excited to be in this role for the challenge and the opportunity to make an impact for this organization that I love. But also, I'm excited that now girls can see there is a job on the field in baseball. It's really cool."

By the way, the Giants won that game 13-2.

Alyssa Nakken joins a long list of women who were first in their field. Other women firsts include:

Victoria Woodhull, who, in 1872 became the first woman in the United States to run for president as the nominee of the Equal Rights Party. Coverage of her candidacy was often sensationalized, and some publications referred to her as "Mrs. Satan." Women didn't even have the right to vote back in 1872.

In 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor was appointed to the US Supreme Court and became the first female justice of our nation's highest court. She served for 25 years before retiring in 2006.

On December 17, 1947, Dorothy Fuldheim became the nation's first nightly newscaster when Cleveland's WEWS-TV Channel 5 asked her to be its nightly newscaster. Dorothy stayed with the news program for 37 years. Fellow broadcast journalism pioneer Barbara Walters described Fuldheim as "the first woman to be taken seriously doing the news."

On April 2, 1917, Jeannette Rankin of Montana was sworn into the House of Representatives, becoming the first woman elected to Congress, after campaigning as a progressive who would work for a constitutional woman suffrage amendment as well as social welfare issues.

In 1880, Anna Howard Shaw became the first woman ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church. That, of course, was one of the forerunner denominations to our own United Methodist Church.

On June 18, 1983, a soft-spoken California physicist named Sally Ride broke the gender barrier on when she became the first American woman to ride into space on the Space Shuttle Challenger. She was also the youngest American astronaut to have traveled to space.

One of the most impressive firsts is found in Acts chapter 16; it's where we find Lydia. Luke tells us that Lydia was a "worshipper of God;" however, she apparently had not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ. What we learn from that is that **sometimes faith and salvation evolve slowly in our lives.**

Lydia responded to the ministry of Paul and Silas, and became the first recorded Christian on the European continent. Notice that I did not say she was the first *female* Christian on the European continent; she was the first recorded *person*—male or female—on the European continent to put her faith in Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior.

With Lydia's conversion, the future of the church was completely redirected. Instead of going eastward around Turkey and then into Asia, the church marched westward into Europe. It eventually swept across the Roman Empire until the Good News ultimately reached Great Britain and Ireland. From there, and centuries later, the church of Jesus Christ crossed the Atlantic Ocean to America.

In a sense, we are all the sons and daughters of Lydia because the westward march of the church began when Lydia became the first convert on the European continent. Think of it! We really know very little about Lydia. We know that she hailed from Thyatira, which was in Turkey, but later moved to Philippi where she became the first Christian convert in Europe. Consequently, Lydia holds a special place in Western history. She's really an unsung hero. But then again, think of all the unsung heroes in your life who have shaped you into the person you are today. They're like the Sunday school teacher who led Billy Graham to Christ.

Taking the gospel to Europe is not what Paul and Silas had originally planned. Earlier in Acts 16, Paul and Silas were early in what we now know as Paul's Second Missionary Journey. They were all set to go north and east into Bithynia, which is located in modern Northern Turkey. In other words, theirs was to be an all-Asian missionary endeavor. But then in verse 7, we read that "the Spirit of Jesus" would not allow them to travel to Bithynia." That's all we know: we don't know how they were prevented or why they were prevented or what prevented them from continuing their missionary journey through Asia.

Then one night Paul had a vision in which a man from Macedonia appeared to him and begged him to "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (vs. 9). Macedonia is in Greece, which, of course, is in Europe. Convinced it was the will of God, Paul and Silas set sail from Troas and made their way to Samothrace, and from there, Neapolis, both in Greece. What we learn from that is that **the Holy Spirit always reserves the right to redirect our plans in order to fulfill the purposes of God.**

Can you think of a time when God redirected your plans—your future—in order to fulfill his purposes?

Once Paul and Silas were redirected to Europe, they made their way to Philippi, the leading city in the Roman district of Macedonia. On the Sabbath, they went outside the city gate to the river, where they expected to find a place of prayer. Were they going to pray themselves? Or did they suspect that there would be others gathered there for prayer? We do not know.

What we do know is that there were several women who had gathered there, and Paul and Silas began telling them the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Among those women was Lydia.

Luke—who wrote the book of Acts—tells us Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. By all indications, Lydia was an entrepreneur. The fact that she dealt in purple cloth suggests that

she catered to the ruling class. By all indications, she was a fairly independent woman. She apparently lived a rather comfortable life; she may have even been wealthy.

Her story is fascinating because Paul had been given a vision in which a man—rather than a woman—appeared to him and pled for him to come over and help them. But when Paul and Silas arrived in Macedonia, they didn't meet a man; they met a woman who became the first recorded convert on the European continent. What we learn from that is that **the Holy Spirit always reserves the right to use a woman rather than a man in order to fulfill the purposes of God.**

In recent years Paul has been vilified by feminist theologians and the like for saying things like, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says" (1 Corinthians 14:34).

In contrast, Luke, who gives us the biography of Paul, is careful to point although may have written one thing in his letters to churches, his practices were very different because every time Paul went into a new community and began to preach and teach about Jesus, he launched his ministry by preaching and teaching women—something that was virtually unheard of in his day. The churches he founded were almost always founded on the faith of women. They were typically Jewish women who chose to follow Jesus. They were women like Lydia.

By all indications, Lydia was a natural leader. She operated a thriving business; only the wealthy wore purple. She became a spiritual leader in her home because after she became a Christian, she and her entire household were baptized at her prompting.

Now if you drop down to verse 40, you'll see that after Paul and Silas were freed from the Philippian jail, they went to the home of Lydia. Lydia turned her faith into good works by showing hospitality to Paul and Silas.

But there's more. Paul and Silas met the "brothers and sisters" at Lydia's house. Apparently Lydia's home became the home for the first Christian church in Philippi. She truly was a remarkable woman!

On this Mother's Day, we honor Lydia as the mother of Western Christianity. We find a woman who opened her heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we find a woman who was a natural leader and who used her leadership skills to advance the church of Jesus Christ in her community.

We might say that following her conversion, Lydia existed to connect people to Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.