

Good morning! This is Sunny Ahn, the Senior Pastor at Kona United Methodist Church. I am glad that you are with us this morning. I believe that God has brought all of us here for God's purpose—first, we know for sure that we are here to worship our God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Second, I am not sure what would be God's 2<sup>nd</sup> purpose of our being here together this morning. However, I believe that we will know it at the end of this worship or after as God opens our hearts and minds...and as we are willing to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. Let us expect a great thing in this hour of worship.

God uses whatever means to bring people to Christ.

**[Story]** Charles Spurgeon, one of the well-known preachers and scholars, tells of a man who once went to a chapel to listen to the singing, but he did not want to hear the preaching. So as soon as the pastor began speaking, the man covers his two ears with his two hands. But after a while, an insect landed on his face. So, he had to take his hand off from the ear to brush it off. Just as he did, the pastor said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." The man listened, and God met him at that point to his soul's conversion.<sup>1</sup>

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The point is this: we are not here this morning accidentally. It is God who was, and still is, at work intentionally orchestrating our divine encounter to draw us to God.

Today's scripture tells us of Lydia's encounter with God which is taken a place in Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> mission journey. Up until this point in his 2<sup>nd</sup> mission journey, Paul had struggled to find a firm direction for his mission work. Without knowing the firm direction, he was faithful to his daily work and what he had to do.

He and Silas, a Christian from Jerusalem, had visited Derbe and Lystra to follow up on the churches Paul had established there on his 1<sup>st</sup> mission journey. In Lystra, Paul invited Timothy to join his mission team, and then Luke joined them in Troas.

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, C. H. (1996). *Spurgeon's Sermons* (Vol. 1). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book.

It was in Troas that Paul received a vision of a man begging him to come to Macedonia to help. After the vision, Paul and his mission team (Silas, Timothy, and Luke) set out as the first missionaries in Macedonia and came to Philippi, a Macedonian frontier town and Roman colony. There Paul and his mission team met Lydia who is often cited as the first European convert to Christianity and a founding member of the church in Philippi.

These days, many things are uncertain as we deal with the pandemic with COVID-19 and the national moral eruption through the death of Georgy Floyd. In this uncertain time, many of us are not sure about many things. One of the lessons from today's scripture is that just be faithful to God while doing whatever we are doing daily at our best in the given situation. Sooner or later, God will convict our heart to take a course of actions in life. Until it happens, let us be calm and keep doing whatever we are doing at our best in the given situation. God will lead us.

Another lesson from Lydia's divine encounter in today's scripture is that God works through His providence to draw God's people to God. God's providence refers to the fact that God is working behind the scenes, even when we are not aware of it. In the Methodist term, it is the prevenient grace. God loves us before we acknowledge His love for us. In other simple words, nothing happens by chance, even though it may seem to us to be by chance.

In our text today, notice with me how God encountered Lydia and moved her from being a worshiper to Christianity. It was not Paul, the preacher, or his preaching that initiated the change, but it was God who caused her to pay attention to the Gospel, and moved her heart to accept Christ, be baptized, and chose to be active in God's mission.

According to the verses 14 and 15 of today's scripture reading, Lydia was from Thyatira, in western Turkey. She was a businesswoman and a worshiper. The term translated "a worshiper of God" means that she was a Gentile who had come to believe in the God of the Jews, although she was not yet a fully proselyte to Judaism.

Here we see that the people who are worshiping are not all Christians, the followers of Jesus Christ. Without knowing Jesus as the Christ, people can be worshipers. Yes, to worship our God is our first duty to accomplish as Christians. However, none-believers of Jesus the Christ also can be in worship. If you are one

of those people who are not sure about the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life, I pray that God will intervene into your life right now and open your heart and mind to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and believe in Him. If you need some help, please don't hesitate to contact me. I am more than happy to assist in whatever ways.

We, Christians, worship the God of Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit...the mysterious three-persons of God who work mysteriously in our lives. I pray our mysterious God works in your life and convict your heart to believe.

Let's go back to today's scripture. According to the verse 6 of chapter 16, the book of Acts, Paul would have preached in Lydia's hometown earlier if the Holy Spirit did not forbid him. Later, through the vision of a Macedonian man calling for help, he came to Philippi. Are you desiring something to happen? Please don't be discouraged if it does happen now at the time you want it to be happened. In God's time, it would happen according to God's will in God's time. Keep praying and pursuing the desire of God in life.

When Paul and his mission team came to Philippi, there was no welcoming like other mission sites. They had to figure out everything by themselves as they stayed there for some days.

On the Sabbath, they went out to look for a place where the Jews gather for worship—a synagogue. They could not find any as Philippi did not have 10 Jewish men to form a synagogue. So, they wandered down by the river and they came upon a small group of women praying. Paul and his team sat down and explained the Good News of Jesus Christ to this small group of women. The Lord opened Lydia's heart, along with the hearts of those in her household, to respond to the message (16:14).

So, the Lord brought Lydia from Western Turkey to Philippi and Paul from wanting to go into western Turkey to Philippi. God brought them together here in Philippi so that Lydia could get saved and the church in Philippi could get started. If we had asked Paul if his intention was to start a church with a group of women, I'm sure he would have said, "No way!" But it was God's way to begin the church in Europe. The Macedonian man he saw in the vision turned out to be an Asian woman! What a surprise, isn't it?

Whether Lydia was married, widowed or single (the Bible doesn't say), she both knew God and chose to follow God. She was baptized and led her household to do the same after hearing God's message through Paul when God opened her mind to pay attention to it. Paul and Silas believed her testimony of faith, accepting the condition of her invitation into her home to start a church in Philippi.

From Lydia's divine encounter, we see that God's plan is better than our own. God interrupted Paul's plans and redirected him towards where God wanted him to go. And Paul let go of his plan and followed God's lead. In following God's directions, Paul was greatly rewarded in meeting Lydia, a woman with an open heart. It was not with "wise and persuasive words" that Paul persuaded Lydia of the truth of Jesus Christ, but rather it was through God's preparation that she was ready to hear the truth and have it set her free. When we are willing to heed or pay attention to God's interruptions to our lives, we also are ready ourselves for God's heavenly provision.

Yes, through the pandemic this year our lives are interrupted. Yes, through the death of George Floyd the lives of America are interrupted more. In these painful interruptions, we have a choice to take a course of action in life by paying our attention to who God is OR to our own frustration. The choice is ours. I pray that we all make a wise and Godly choice by giving our attention to our God. Amen.