



May 9, 2010
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Mother's Day

"And The Lord Opened Her Heart..." * Rev. James Lamkin

Acts 16:9-15; Revelation 21:1-4, 22:1-5
John 14:23-29

A line from the first lesson has a poetic ring to it. It is as if the biblical writer lets us eavesdrop on the most personal of all conversations...the conversation one has with one's self and with God. It is holy ground, sacred space.

It is the phrase, **and the Lord opened her heart.** And the lord opened her heart.

On this Mother's Day, may it be true for each mother present and for each of us. And the lord opened her heart.

We don't know the back story.

Perhaps the motivating issue was success. Doing well. You have to keep succeeding. The burden of success. Maybe she was in the top 100 businessmen...and women. Perhaps her business of making purple dye or purple garments was going well. Maybe too well. Perhaps the burden of success was leverage point. **and the Lord opened her heart.**

Maybe failure. Sometimes the life we are living is not the life we intended to live. The ethics we live by are not those we planned on. Perhaps it was her failure that was the pivot point **and the Lord opened her heart.**

Maybe it is simpler than that. Maybe she was a mother. One day she came home to find an adolescent living inside her child's body. It was an alien abduction. And since she could not change her kid, she worked on changing herself. **and the Lord opened her heart.**

Maybe she was a widow whose world had fallen apart.

Maybe her father and mother had gotten sick and older and they died and she buried them and all of that is heroic. It is done what loved demands. **and the Lord opened her heart.**

So she goes down to the river to pray.

And it becomes the Glad River. The one the Psalmist references that makes glad the city of God. The one lined with trees whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

It all started with the Apostle Paul having to settle for the second best. A tough thing for him...or any of us to do. He was headed for a place called Bithynia. But try as he might, “the spirit if Jesus forbade them.” God had walled off Plan A.

But one night, Paul has a dream that a man from Macedonia, across the sea, on another continent, was calling to him. And the man from Macedonia was saying, “Come over and help us.”

Paul took it as a sign and sets in motion Plan B; and sails for Europe.

But turns out he was wrong about that too. It wasn't a man in the dream. It was a woman. It was Lydia.

And God was at work in her life too. God was about to open her heart.

If the biblical writer named Luke were the producer of the TV show named *Heroes*, all of the stars would be women.

Women are given extensive monologues at the birth of Jesus in Luke's gospel. Women are the first witnesses of the empty tomb. And in today's lesson, of Luke's history of the early church, the news of Jesus crosses from Asia into Europe and the first convert who becomes possibly the first European pastor is a woman—a business woman, name Lydia.

Is your heart opened? It is a *God thing* when our hearts open.

As much as we may say we want to be open to an experience with the holy, perhaps only God can make us so.

And the Lord opened her heart.

All sorts of questions came to my mind when I read that. Like: are we born with closed hearts that God later opens? Or are we born with open hearts that life with its fears and failures, with its angst and anger, dangers and pains builds up scar tissue and walls us off from healing? **and the Lord opened her heart.** When that happens, it is an alchemical moment. Lydia became a part of the river.

All of her life was spend greening, ripening, and waiting. **and the Lord opened her heart.**

I remember times when my heart was opened.

I remember when a black woman named Addie stood at my grandmother's death bed. I remember her tears that pooled in her bottom eye lids. And the Lord opened my heart beyond my programming on race.

I remember working at a hospital for the mentally ill. And my heart was opened because my categories of belief and spiritual laws broke apart.

I remember an elderly Jewish woman in the hospital who would pray for me when I came by. And my heart was opened to a wider concept of faith.

I remember reading *Brother to a Dragonfly* by Will D. Campbell in my first pastorate. It kept me in the ministry. And my heart was opened.

We need our hearts to be open. There is a lot that needs caregiving in this ole world.

- the catastrophe off the Louisiana coast
- the evacuation of Times Square
- the flooding of Nashville

- electronics plus human anxiety = a freefall of the stock market
- earthquakes and volcanoes
- the European debt crisis focused on Greece
- immigration
- health care

If you got a call tonight, and someone asked, “When was the last time God opened your heart, what would you tell them?”

For me it was two weeks ago while standing in Ephesus. In that ancient city I led worship. It was Christian worship with Jews and Muslims present.

In the middle of the sermon a group of Koreans walked across the main floor and began singing *How Great Thou Art*. The Jews and Muslims wondered what it was. The Christians knew and we began to sing. We sang in English, the Koreans in Korean. It was beautiful.

It was one of those moments that it felt like I had lived all of my life preparing for that one moment.

And God opened my heart, just like God does yours.

*These are some of the notes James Lamkin used in preaching this morning’s sermon.